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Decentering Revolutionary Visions: The Politics and Poetics of Representation in Nicolás Guillén Landrián's *Coffea Arabiga*

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Decentering Revolutionary Visions: The Politics and Poetics of Representation in Nicolás Guillén Landrián's *Coffea Arabiga*

by

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Dedication

A mis padres, dos grandes maestros, cuyo amor es mi mayor inspiración.

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This work has been the result of many years of fortunate encounters with great teachers. I am immensely thankful for their trust, their encouragement and support along the way. I would like to acknowledge and thank all my professors at the University of Texas at Austin and particularly, my thesis advisor George Flaherty whose advices have been crucial to the development of the ideas I am proud to present. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Cherise Smith, who has taught me to think about identity in deep and meaningful ways. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to Eddie Chambers, whose trust and encouragement has been a constant source of strength throughout this process.

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Abstract

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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In 1967 Afro-Cuban artist and filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián returned to the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) in Havana after suffering months of confinement; first at a farm—where he was sent on a forced temporary reclusion for "improper conduct"—and later at a psychiatric institution. Upon his return, Landrián was not allowed back at the Documentary Department. Instead, he was assigned to work at the Popular Encyclopedia a section within the Non-Fiction Department responsible for producing State-commissioned didactic documentaries. That year, he was commissioned to create a documentary about the massive agricultural plan Havana Greenbelt designed by the government to increase agricultural production in the island's capital and promote national unity. The documentary would focus on the production of coffee and the mobilization of thousands of city dwellers to the agricultural fields in the outskirts of the city. The following year Landrián finishes *Coffea Arabiga,* a

documentary that breaks away from the conventions of the institutional didactic documentary to question revolutionary politics of representation and its regime of visibility. This study considers the didactic documentary *Coffea Arabiga* (1968) as a critical document for understanding Landrián's vision as a black artist within the sociopolitical context of the 1960s in Cuba and challenges previous approaches to film practices in Cuba established upon the notion that they formed a politically and ideologically discursive unity given that they were created within institutional and genre boundaries. It is my thesis that not only Landrián problematizes the social and political objectivity of revolutionary discourses by revealing the tensions and contradictions behind it, but reclaims the presence of political and social identities that the revolutionary regime of visibility silenced.

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Introduction

In 1967 Afro-Cuban artist and filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián returned to the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) in Havana after suffering months of confinement; first at a farm—where he was sent on a forced temporary reclusion for 'improper conduct'—and later at a psychiatric institution.[1] Upon his return, Landrián was not allowed back at the Documentary Department.[2] Instead, he was assigned to work at the Popular Encyclopedia (Enciclopedia Popular), a section within the Non-Fiction Department responsible for producing State-commissioned didactic documentaries.[3] That year, he was commissioned to create a documentary about the massive agricultural plan Havana Greenbelt designed by the government to increase agricultural production in the island's capital and promote national unity. The documentary would focus on the production of coffee and the mobilization of thousands of city dwellers to the agricultural fields in the outskirts of the city. The following year

[1] Ramos, Julio. "Cine, archivo y poder: entrevista a Manuel Zayas en Nueva York", *laFuga*, 2013, [Consulted Nov. 2016] http://2016.lafuga.cl/cine-archivo-y-poder-entrevista-a-manuel-zayas-en-nueva-york/66

[2] The circumstances surrounding Landrián's return to ICAIC are not very clear. Cuban filmmaker Manuel Zayas assures that he was not admitted back at first but that his father, a lawyer and brother of Cuba's National Poet Nicolás Guillén interceded so he could be admitted. Landrián's widow Gretel Alfonso states that it was thanks to Theodor Christensen, the Danish filmmaker, who spoke with the directors of ICAIC in behalf of Landrián.

[3] The Popular Encyclopedia is established in 1961 to support the "Literacy Campaign" taking place and marking the "Year of Education". As Michael Chanan has observed, the documentaries produced in this section served a political and instructive purpose and followed what was considered a "correct" structure in terms of narrative, editing, sound effects, etc. According to Chanan, there were multiple categories through which didactic documentaries were denominated to facilitate administrative control. Thus, although for some special editions some level of experimentation, or creative freedom was permitted, for the most part these documentaries —diverse in theme—presented almost no variation in their formal structure.

Landrián finishes *Coffea Arabiga,* a documentary that breaks away from the conventions of the institutional didactic documentary to question revolutionary politics of representation and its regime of visibility through the development of a poetics of documentary. This study considers the didactic documentary *Coffea Arabiga* (1968) as a critical document for understanding Landrián's vision as a black artist within the sociopolitical context of the 1960s in Cuba and challenges previous approaches to film practices in Cuba established upon the notion that they formed a politically and ideologically discursive unity given that they were created within institutional and genre boundaries. It is my thesis that not only Landrián problematizes the social and political objectivity of revolutionary discourses by revealing the tensions and contradictions behind it, but reclaims the presence of racial and gender identities.

The Havana Greenbelt was a State project that sought to turn the nation's capital into a self-sufficient production front by mobilizing city dwellers to the outskirts of the city.[4] Through a rhetoric of production and collectivism the government sought to promote national integration, while a massive media campaign was to focus its attention in the mobilization of *habaneros* and their work at the agricultural fields. These types of production plans were thought to bring about a revolutionary consciousness as they had

[4] In 1967 the Cuban revolutionary government began to implement the agricultural plan known as El Cordon de la Habana (Havana Greenbelt). It consisted in re-utilizing the land around the city of Havana to plant fruits, coffee and other agricultural products. The project required a massive amount of field labor. To be accomplished, the plan required approximately 25 000 workers from the city, who would abandon their jobs temporarily and be mobilized to the fields. The process was accompanied by a massive media campaign. Printed posters began to appear everywhere around the city and it had full media coverage. Coffee was one of the most important products that were being cultivated due to its exportation value. The plan ended up being a failure and coffee production suffered a radical decrease nationwide.

ideological and political implications.[5] Havana Greenbelt it was conceived to be an epic turnaround of ideological values that were considered an impediment to economic progress. By entering in contact with the rural, *habaneros* could now 'learn' from peasants the hardship and exploitation they experienced before the Revolution.[6]

Given that agricultural labor was mostly considered the work of blacks and peasants, with the mobilization of mostly white middle class city dwellers to the outskirts of the city, the government thought to eliminate racial and regional divisions since now agricultural labor would be carried out by 'all'. The Havana Greenbelt plan reveals the anxieties permeating the government's attempt to deal with the lingering problem of regional and racial divisions by simultaneously trying to conceal them. The production plan failed, but the spectacle of production generated by it exposed the contradictions at the heart of a rhetoric of integration and production that functioned to further racist and paternalistic attitudes that erased subjectivities and rendered blackness invisible.

In *Coffea Arabiga,* Landrián reveals the racial, social and political anxieties underlying revolutionary discourses and the government's schizoid strategy to order race through a political rhetoric of collectivism and social objectivity. Thus, although the film unfolds as a didactic documentary about coffee production, departing from the process of planting, to the care and appropriate conditions for its growing, to the final process at the factory; the filmmaker builds over and through the film's didactic structure and its

[5] Between 1965 and 1970 there were several plans of production in agriculture and farming. The Havana Greenbelt and The Ten Million Ton Sugar Harvest are the most important ones.

[6] Chase, Michelle; "The Country and the City in the Cuban Revolution", Colombia Internacional 73, June 2011.

propagandistic function a series of metacommentaries and decenterings to craft a conceptual framework that calls attention to the politics of representation underlying revolutionary visual and political rhetoric and the legacies of colonial and Western ideologies. This study considers Coffea Arabiga a meta-documentary, meaning a documentary that reflects upon the structures and discourses that shape it. Landrián's treatment of the didactic documentary of production turns it into a documentary about production. The documentary critiques the politics of representation by exploring the poetics or process of meaning production and the acts of erasure and inscription permeating it. By resisting and revealing politics of erasure Landrián re-inscribes subjectivities within the present and conflicting visual regime of his documentary practice.

This thesis furthers some of the ideas developed by literature scholar Aisha Cort in her study of what she argues is an Afro-Cuban aesthetic that connects the work of black filmmakers and writers during the 60s and 70s in Cuba.[7] In her discussion of *Coffea Arabiga*, Cort borrows the term *contrapunteo* from Cuban cultural anthropologist Fernando Ortiz to describe how Landrián disrupts the government's official discourse of integration and liberation in post-revolutionary Cuba. She contends that through the insertion of "dissident" images Landrián develops a counter-aesthetic, counter-discourse and counter-narrative tangential or in opposition to that of the government, particularly

[7] Cort, Aisha Z. "Negrometraje, Literature and Race in Revolutionary Cuba"; Dissertation, Emory University, 2010.

concerning the politics of gender and race.[8] My study reflects upon the tensions that Cort underlines but thinks beyond an Afro-Cuban aesthetics and through a historical racial and political consciousness that manifested in Landrián's documentary practice as a form of resisting a politics of erasure. This approach allows me to consider *Coffea Arabiga* as the filmmaker's own unique creation and the product of his own reflecting upon the circumstances that conditioned it. Understanding the film as an artistic and critical entity and not only a series of interventions or subversive gestures, allows me to consider not one but several critiques and meanings operating throughout the film and avoids repeating narratives of absence and erasure that the filmmaker himself revoked. My argument proposes that with the film Landrián resists and critiques revolutionary politics of representation by questioning its relationship with colonial and Western ideologies, practices and legacies.

This study dialogues with existing scholarly literature that examines the work of Landrián in relation to his critique of the government's race-blind rhetoric and its politics of visibility. Literature and film scholar Julio Ramos —who has done extensive research about the filmmaker's multifaceted work— discusses how Landrián's didactic documentary *Desde la Habana:1969! Recordar* (1969) critiques the color-blind rhetoric as it functioned to further whiteness —as represented through U.S. mainstream culture— and in turn, making blackness invisible.[9] Anna Garhland Maher's article published in the

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8 Cort, *Negrometraje* [p.48]

9 Ramos, Julio. "Los archivos de Guillén Landrián", *laFuga*, 2013. [Consulted Nov. 2016] http://2016.lafuga.cl/los-archivos-de-guillen-landrian/659

magazine *Small Axe* argues that in *Coffea Arabiga* Landrián critiques the hypocritical and contradictory posture of the revolutionary government's internationalist campaign supporting black and Third World liberation movements by revealing the perpetuation of racial divisions in Cuba.[10] On her part, Odette Casamayor offers an in depth analysis of the politics of race in post-Revolutionary Cuba by discussing how Landrián's film *Coffea Arabiga* and Sara Gómez' documentary *Iré a Santiago* resist stereotypical representations of the Revolution's "new black subject".[11] My study builds upon these approaches and moves beyond them to address how Landrián not only reveals these contradictions but re-claims the political, social and cultural presence of blackness by disrupting narratives and forms of representation that rendered it a fixed, a-historical, a-temporal, folkloric and peripheral identity.

Manuel Zayas has stated that Landrián's films "have had a destabilizing effect in the history of Cuban Cinema" which "established that during this period film was all propaganda".[12] Yet, my argument is that Landrián in fact resists claims of aesthetic and political objectivity conveyed through revolutionary film practices by insisting in the spatial and temporal existence of subjectivities. *Coffea Arabiga* constitutes a critical document for understanding Landrián's experience as a black artist within the complex

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[10] Mahler, Anne Garland. "'Todos Los Negros Y Todos Los Blancos Y Todos Tomamos Café': Race and the Cuban Revolution in Nicolás Guillén Landrián's Coffea Arábiga." Small Axe, Duke Univerity Press, March 2015.

[11] Casamayor-Cisneros, Odette; "Imagining the "New Black Subject": Ethical Transformations and Raciality in the Post-Revolutionary Cuban Nation", ed. Jerome C. Branche, *Black writing, culture, and the state in Latin America*, Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015.

[12] Ramos, "Cine".

and contradictory sociopolitical context of post-Revolutionary Cuba. Thus, this study situates Landrián's documentary within two contexts. The first one is the socio-political context in which filmmaking practices developed during the 1960s in Cuba and the different ideologies, political identities and subjectivities that shaped them. The second context is that of a political consciousness of blackness that has historically resisted exclusionary nationalist discourses of integration and struggled against racism. The filmmaker's critical approach to the problem of visibility and erasure of the black subject also resists myths of origin that have framed blackness as a historized and folklorized identity existing in the past by critiquing and decentering the continuity of colonial readings of history that narrate and order subjects and experience.

Coffea Arabiga has been celebrated as the most experimental documentary produced in Cuba during a period when what is known today as *revolutionary cinema* was establishing as a leading film movement in Latin America.[13] Even during the time that Landrián worked at ICAIC his films were recognized and praised. After 1965 Landrián's films began to be censored by official authorities and in 1974 he was expelled from the institution due to a controversy over his documentary *Taller de Línea y 18*.[14] His

[13] Other film movements that had emerged in Latin American around the same period were Glauber Rocha's Cinema Novo in Brazil and in Argentina Fernando Solanas' The Liberation Film Group. Solanas coined the term Third Cinema to refer to the growing movements of militant film in what were considered Third World countries since they all opposed neocolonialism, U.S. imperialism, capitalism and its Hollywood model of cinema.

[14] Landrián expressed his believe that it was this documentary what caused his expulsion of ICAIC. He stated that official authorities and a radio host found the documentary disrespectful to the workers of the bus assemblage workshop. The official authorities at ICAIC decided that the workers needed to decide after watching the documentary. The workers at the workshop were gathered for the screening and thought that there was no problem with it.

documentaries remained unknown for over two decades until 1989 when they began to be screened—although only for specialized audiences—inside and outside of Cuba.[15] Landrián suffered years of persecution and imprisonment in Cuba, receiving gruesome psychiatric treatments and spending several years in prison for various accusations, among them conspiracy against the government. In 1989 Landrián went into exile and emigrated to Miami where he painted and directed his last documentary *Downtown Miami* (2001) before passing away in 2003. Some of his documentaries are lost but most of them have been rescued, preserved and are available in online digital media. After the 1990s, young filmmakers found interests in his work and produced biographical documentaries with his collaboration. There are Manuel Zayas' *Café con leche* (2001), a biographic essay about the evolution of Landrián's work and his experience as a filmmaker in Cuba and Jorge Egusquiza Zorrilla's *El fin pero no es el fin* (2003) which was produced during the making process of Landrián's last film *Downtown Miami* (2003).

The "oblivion" of Landrián's *ouvre* from major publications on Cuban cinema has been the result of years of censorship.[16] Yet, the motives for the censorship of his documentaries still today lack a clear explanation. This fact has put in question the

[15] Cuban documentary maker Manuel Zayas explains that Landrián's documentaries were shown at the Muestra de Jóvenes Realizadores in the late 1990s. The Muestra is an annual event hosted by the EICTV (Cuba's International School of Film and Television) where Cuban documentaries from the 1960s-70s are screened to a group of students and a selected audience.

[16] I am referring to the most famous books on Cuban film written by the British film scholar Michael Chanan titled *Cuban Cinema* and *The Cuban Image.* His omission of Landrián raises questions regarding the politics behind research practices in Cuba. Chanan's uncritical approach makes his work highly problematic. Thus, this study intersects his readings of what he considers canonical Cuban documentaries.

legitimacy of an ideological and political homogeneity through which film institutional practices during the 1960s have come to be understood. Yet, Landrián's absence points to several and more complex dynamics that have taken place through historiographical practices in Cuba, its politics and mechanisms of exclusion. This thesis is an attempt to re-construct and re-imagine —if only briefly— the context of the 1960s in its complexity. I address the role that revolutionary discourse had in shaping the different ideologies, theories, practices and political positions underlying documentary practices while considering it a practice where conflicting political and artistic visions struggled to co-exist. Revolutionary cinema, I argue, as a homogeneous ideological and aesthetic unity did not go uncontested and the documentaries by Landrián and Sara Gómez attest for this.

Within the theoretical framework of this study, revolutionary cinema is discussed in terms of what Jacques Ranciere calls a regime of visibility, a "delimitation of spaces and times of the visible and the invisible" that sought to recuperate a nationalist paradigm by situating the Revolution as historical event and imaginary national space.[17] This thesis departs from the understanding that such paradigm, permeating official art and film histories of Cuba, has been contested by Afro-Cuban artists and intellectuals throughout history. The term revolutionary cinema —which emerged through the notion that institutional practices constitute discursive unities— has furthered the idea that institutional film practices formed a coherent ideological and political unity that

[17] Ranciére, Jacques; *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2011. [p. 13]

manifested through experimentation with genre categories and formal qualities of film. The first chapter of this study questions the valence of such paradigm by re-examining the political and theoretical ideologies of documentary—as a genre and a medium—at play in the distinct approaches to documentary practice between the two Afro-Cuban documentary makers and canonical revolutionary documentaries from the same period. The understanding of aesthetic experimentation as the organization of formal elements in innovative ways has served to re-establish the idea that revolutionary cinema represented a homogeneous process of socio-political change, when it was, in fact, a manifestation of heterogeneous expressions of different and conflicting subjectivities and political visions.[18]

A discussion of *Coffea Arabiga* cannot be limited to the formal or aesthetic concerns determined by a medium or genre precisely because Landrián himself contested the politics of medium-specificity and genre as discursive systems of representation that functioned to erase subjects. However, this thesis brings attention to the ways in which the filmmaker conceptualizes his artistic practice as a decentering practice. Furthermore, his exploration of the possibilities of the documentary, as a genre, is not situated around the question of the truth-value of the documentary. It is concerned with the quality of documentary to inscribe subjects *other* (blacks and peasants) in the present, contrary to fiction, which represented them in the past. My analysis fluctuates between macro and micro historical approaches by complicating the understanding of how institutional

[18] Gurevitch, Michael; Bennett, Tony; Curran, James; Woollcalott, Janet; *Culture, Society and the Media*, Routedge, New York, 1982

documentary practices and discourses about race and racism operated in the context of the 1960s in Cuba. This study seeks to debunk the notion that institutional films practices emerged as the result of a national and homogeneous process of political conscience and identity formation. This view has its origins in nationalist paradigms established during the Independence War and was furthered during the Republic period. The trope of integration—now largely criticized for silencing Cuba's internal social and racial conflicts—foregrounded the term *mestizaje* (cultural and racial mixing) during the beginning of the XX century and has, since then, prevented an understanding of the social, political and cultural complexities that inform racial identity and denied the persistence of racism in Cuban society.[19] What I hope to uncover is how Landrián tests the boundaries of the Revolution's discourse of integration by decentering the ideologies, structures of revolutionary regimes of visibility and representation.

In Chapter 1 I discuss some instances within the film where Landrián calls attention to both process and viewing experience to critique the objectivity of revolutionary forms of representation and discourses by reclaiming the presence of subjects. Following this premise, I interrogate the term revolutionary cinema and its relationship with the Revolution as a mediated phenomenon that, simultaneously, mediated film practices and vice versa. I explore the relationship between this term, the Revolution as a visual phenomenon, and the two film movements considered to be the major influences of institutional documentary practices in Cuba during the 1960s.

[19] One important study that debunks the theory of *mestizaje* is Vera Kutzinksy's book *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*.

Furthermore, this chapter provides a framework for understanding how the work of Sara Gómez and Landrián operated within institutional film practices and yet outside or tangential to the discursive frameworks and regimes of visibility that revolutionary discourse and revolutionary cinema established. I discuss their approach to the documentary practice, how they represent subjects—particularly black and peasant subjects—and questioned forms of spectatorship that reproduced racial and regional divisions and how this lead to the censoring of their documentaries. This chapter constitutes a critical intervention in the historiography of Cuban film as it re-assesses documentary as a genre that not only concerns film as a field of study but the politics of representation as a field within art history and media studies.

In Chapter 2 I perform a close reading of some sequences and instances within *Coffea Arabiga* to lay out how Landrián develops a conceptual and aesthetic framework through continuous splitting and de-centering gestures that reveal the tensions and contradictions underlying the *Havana Greenbelt* and the government's exclusionary rhetoric of integration. Reading the documentary along these tensions I analyze how Landrián reclaims blackness as a presence in the time and space of the contemporaneous. Through a complex system of signification and resignification the filmmaker resists the revolutionary regime of visibility which—according to Ranciere—was "based on the indetermination of identities, the delegitimization of positions of speech, the deregulation

of partitions of space and time" by re-claiming subjectivities as spatially and temporally present through his own documentary practice as a position speech.[20]

This thesis looks beyond narratives of subversion that situate political dissidence as central to the filmmaker's institutional critique and claims that Landrián's anti-establishment and critical vision do not emerge solely from his conflicting relationship with the institution or with the State as systems that repressed artistic freedom, but through a political consciousness grounded in the historical and personal experience of discrimination and exclusion out of which censorship and repression were but an effect. The regimes that Landrián sought to dismantle and critique were not only ideologically or aesthetically determined, but politically grounded in a racial consciousness as a historical struggle between erasure and inscription.

[20] Ranciére, *The politics* [p. 14-15]

Decentering Revolutionary Visions

"*We wanted to make avant-garde films*"

Nicolás Guillén Landrián (2003)[21]

Marking the cinematic genesis of *Coffea Arabiga* is one of the most intriguing images in Nicolás Guillén Landrián's cinematographic *ouvre*: a light circle located at the center of a dark background. (Fig. 1) It poses a challenge to any attempt at describing it because one wanders if the image is fixed or moving. The light circle seems static, anchored to the dark background. Yet, its throbbing edges push outwards, like a beat or pulse. This initial image situates us within a cinematic experience inscribed in the recognition of forms and sensorial experiences. The light circle evokes form and presence, space and time. It points to what is outside the narrative and within a poetics that manifests through the act of production, of making. This image claims a space outside the objectivity conveyed through narratives and forms of representation that order and delimit experience and subjectivities. Claiming a space outside the objectivity through which revolutionary discourse and institutional film practices present historical and contemporary narratives, the filmmaker proposes a cinema where forms and sensorial perception guide the narrative. Thus, putting on doubt the objectivity through which revolutionary film practices withheld perceptive experience as social and political 'truths'. Chapter 1 constitutes a historiographical intervention within the history of film

[21] Zayas, Manuel. *Café Con Leche*. EICTV, Cuba, 2003. Film.

practices in Cuba during the 1960s as a preamble to introduce Landrián's critical vision and decentering gesture in *Coffea Arabiga*.

REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA

One of the fundamental questions of this study is what exactly is Cuban revolutionary cinema? Firstly, it is a body of scholarship that narrates film practices in Cuba during the 1960s around the central axis of the Revolution as a political event. Simultaneously, is a film practice that functioned within and advanced certain discourses and ideologies. Film historian Michael Chanan speaks of a "cinema of euphoria" to refer to the celebratory spirit of joy and optimism that the Revolution brought with it which "impressed every honest visitor."[22] The term "revolutionary cinema" emerges then from an understanding of the Revolution as primarily and foremost a visible event, a national and epic spectacle that film could render visible. Film practices during this period are intercepted by narratives of *lo nacional* through visual and political rhetoric of *lo revolucionario* that represented the Revolution as a phenomenon *of* the visible, and the representation *of* the visible as a product of the Revolution.

In this Chapter I discuss the role of revolutionary documentary practices in shaping a notion of social and political objectivity. Precisely because documentary was historically linked to 'truthfulness'—a notion based on the indexicality and visual accuracy of the medium and a Western tradition that conceives vision as ocular objectivity—it was used to craft a spatial-temporal visual space where the revolutionary

[22] Michael. *Cuban Cinema*. N-New, Second. Vol. 14. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. [p. 119]

experience existed as an expression of the Revolution's 'truth'. This visual space of 'truth' was conditioned by a revolutionary rhetoric and political discourse that functioned to delineate the representational axis of documentary practices. The documentary work of Nicolás Guillen Landrián and Sara Gómez was invested with the capacity that documentary had to situate subjects, events, and experiences in the space and time of the present. Their practices would not only transform the political space of the present but claim the contemporaneity of different subjectivities. As a result, their practice would put in crisis the social and political objectivity that revolutionary discourse claimed and censorship followed.

Founded only three months after the *guerrilleros* entered Havana in January of 1959, ICAIC was established in opposition to U.S. imperialist and neocolonial cultural and economic interventionist politics. Fashioned after the leftist film movements that emerged in Latin America during the 50s such as Glauber Rocha's Cinema Novo in Brazil and in Argentina Fernando Solanas' The Liberation Film Group; ICAIC claimed rupture from the cultural domination of Hollywood's commercial film practices. Whereas radio played a key role in developing an aural experience of the revolution as an experience located in the mountains, documentary visualized the Revolution as a phenomenon of the city.[23] Whereas the voice of the rebels through the radio 'proved' the presence and struggle of the rebels in the mountains, documentary film 'confirmed' their victory in the city.

[23] I refer to the radio station Radio Rebelde sat up by Ernesto Che Guevara in 1958 while at Sierra Maestra. The Cuban government had no control of the radio waves and so it became the most direct way to reach anybody who had access to a radio.

Film, as a form of public spectatorship, implicated also a form of public participation, which distanced it from television's commodified and individualistic viewing experience.[24] The institution was established as one of *art*, which granted it a sense of autonomy, and *industry*, a form of production. Thus, the foundation of the Cuban film institution—as an *art industry*—furthered Western and colonial paradigms that celebrated industrialization and positivism, considering that it was U.S. imperialism what prevented the country's economic development and slowed down social progress.

Suddenly, a wave of filmmakers was out on the streets of Havana carrying their cameras and turning the public space into a space of *lo moderno*. The public presence of film technology mapped the urban landscape and the Revolution as modern phenomena. In turn, the revolutionary government turned the public space into a space of political performance. Film as mass media and crowds as mass phenomena together represented the Revolution as a modern phenomenon precisely because a mere seizure of power had turned the country into a visible spectacle.[25] Furthermore, public military display was prominent during the first years after the Revolution and more so after the CIA-sponsored paramilitary invasion of Bay of Pigs in 1961. The presence of military and film equipment around the streets of Vedado with its international architectural style brought both continuity and rupture.

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[24] For Peter Bürger, precisely because the technological medium is not recognized as part of an ideological apparatus, it fails to question its own institutional status as art and thus aligns itself with a highly reactionary politics by highlighting and reinforcing the self-defining institutional role of autonomous art.

[25] I am using the term spectacle following Guy Debord's use of the term in his text *The Society of the spectacle*, to refer to mass media in "its most glaring superficial manifestation".

The city was still a place for the display of modern technology.[26] Yet, because Havana's modern architecture represented the traces of U.S.' imperialist project as one that rendered the city a site for entertainment, the presence of military equipment did indeed transform the landscape by inflicting an image of rupture through a visual rhetoric of violence.[27] This idea of rupture, which was also represented in cinema through an aesthetics of violence, conceptualized the new cinema as a rupture with the past as now films would be produced "by Cubans and for Cubans". Yet, film as a technology that conditioned forms of spectatorship and was conditioned by the very idea of spectatorship, of looking at others, was thought to be transformed through the mere ability of film and the Revolution to render visible. The idea that viewing was an objective and homogeneous experience paralleled the social and political objectivity of revolutionary discourse.

Cuban film historians have established that documentary practices during the 1960s were influenced by two main film schools, that of Soviet avant-garde and Italian

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[26] As early as 1960, an envoy of cultural and government officials from the Soviet Union was sent to Havana to begin negotiating political, military and economic alliances. The next year Russian film director Mijail Kalatozov began filming the "revolutionary film epic" *Soy Cuba*. A few months after the film began to be shot the Cuban Missile Crisis took place, marking the climax of an over a decade long Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. A war that was coldly fought, meaning only symbolically, over technological power. Kalatozov's use of military technology to create special effects aimed at creating an innovative aesthetic that would convey the Cuban Revolution through a modern vision. Kalatozov's film was censored because, as Cuban critic Luis M. Lopez stated in the article "No soy Cuba" (I am not Cuba, its extreme aesthetics was "too disconnected from Cuba's social reality". Lopez' originally appeared in the Cuban cultural magazine *Bohemia* after the premier of *Soy Cuba* in 1964.

[27] The city of Havana, which was considered "America's playground", was transformed visually into a military space. Yet, contradictions between continuation and rupture regarding the modernist project quickly emerged. They are explored in the Cuban film by Tomas Guiterrez Alea's *Memories of underdevelopment* (1968), which suggests that such failure was the result of the country's underdevelopment, in other words, its inherent backwardness.

neorealism.[28] Dutch documentary maker Joris Ivens arrived in Havana in 1960 in support of the new socialist government and ICAIC. He was then Europe's most important militant filmmaker. At ICAIC he trained the group of mostly young and amateurs filmmakers and following a request from the Fidel Castro himself, he trained military man on how to use a film camera while in combat.[29] Ivens, Chanan writes, "represented an ideal that Cubans could readily identify with, the participant witness who wielded the camera with the precision of the rifle."[30] Ivens' approach to documentary was informed by his experience filming during the Spanish Civil War and WWII and he admitted being influenced by Russian avant-garde film school. Among other things, Chanan observes that he was a master of the frame and advised Cuban filmmakers to practice "direct filming".[31] This principle recalls Vertov's concept of Kino-Pravda, meaning 'eye-truth', which proposed the integration of filmmaker and camera. For Vertov, the truth about the visible could be discerned through the objective scientific system of Marxism, which was the fundamental task of documentary film as a technological system. Thus, the camera granted the filmmaker his status as an objective witness as it constituted "a scientific tool for deciphering the world."[32]

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[28] Sanchez, Jorge Luis; *Romper la tension del arco: Movimiento Cubano de cine documental*. La Habana, Cuba: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984.

[29] Chanan; *Cuban* [p. 197]

[30] Ibid; [p. 196]

[31] Ibid; [p. 198]

[32] Vertov, Dziga; *Kino-eye: The writings of Dziga Vertov*, Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 1984.

The Cuban filmmaker who best responded to the tradition of Soviet film was Santiago Álvarez. Film scholar Joshua Malinsky studied the overlaps between Álvarez and Vertov's work and outlined the similarities and differences of their film styles and the ways in which their films functioned to advance the State's politics and ideology. The author draws parallels between Álvarez work as the director of ICAIC's Latin America Weekly Newsreel founded in 1960, and Vertov's 1919 travelogue films such as *Red Star*.[33] Much like Vertov's traveling ship along the Volga river, Álvarez newsreels were produced through his travels around Cuba's countryside, where he went documenting the living conditions of peasants and the impact of the Revolution's reforms.[34]

Álvarez' newsreels presented the countryside as a field of visibility where the Revolution's 'truthfulness' manifested through the objectivity that the camera possessed as a technological medium. Whereas the city was the visible space of euphoria, the countryside *had become* visible through the arrival of the Revolution as a technological experience. This division between urban-rural was rooted in colonial processes that racialized space by creating hierarchies between city and countryside, center and periphery. The Revolution's technological and ideological positivism thought to transform these binary spatial divisions and their unequal power relationships by yet perpetuating notions of progress and backwardness.

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[33] Malitsky, Joshua. *Post-Revolutionary Nonfiction Film: Building the Soviet and Cuban Nations*, Indiana University Press, 2013.

[34] The Agrarian Reform (1959) and the Literacy Campaign (1960) are two examples.

This idea is best represented in the documentary *Por primera vez* from 1968, directed by Octavio Cortázar, a filmmaker who had studied at the Prague film school.[35] Chanan describes the film as one where the camera style conveys disembodiment and objectivity to bring the 'reality' of the situation.[36] The film begins with a brief interview to the man in charge of taking the *cine móbil* to intricate areas of the country where they narrate the difficulties of the journey.[37] Throughout most of the documentary, women and man from a rural village are asked whether they have watched a movie or seen film technology before. A long sequence towards the end takes place at a screening where *for the first time* a movie screening takes place the village.

The scene shows people from the village gathered inside a semi-dark room watching Charles Chaplin's film *Modern Time* which, ironically, makes fun of industrialization and technology. The shots focus mostly on the children's expressions of amusement. (Fig. 2) The objective value of film technology—as an advancement brought by the Revolution—is conveyed in this final scene, when the documentary 'reveals' the

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[35] The Prague Film School, also known as FAMU, was founded in 1946/47 as a film section of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. At least two historical sources track the origins of the school. First, through the lectures of several film historians and screenwriters who had various backgrounds (Czechoslovak Film School and Hollywood) and the second source was an attempt of teacher, ethnographer, photographer and documentarist Karel Plicka.

[36] Chanan; *Cuban*, [p. 27]

[37] Tamara Falicov's essay "Mobile cinemas in Cuba: The Forms and Ideologies of Travelling Exhibitions" describes Cuban cine móbil as follows. "Like Russian agit-prop trains that filmed peasants and screened films in the countryside after the 1917 Revolution, Cuban cine mobiles also emphasized bringing cinema to the rural provinces. In the Cuban case, cinema was used both in educational and entertainment contexts, in the hope that rural areas might be integrated into the nation-building project led by Castro's socialist government. These cinemas were a sign of progress and of modernity for the revolutionary government, and a means of communication with a historically disenfranchised population. Hand-in-hand with this project was a movement for better healthcare as well as a literacy campaign that were mobilized concurrently."

children's amusement when experiencing the fictive quality of Hollywood films. The documentary signifies itself as conveying a series of 'truths', that both Revolution and film technology had the ability to render peasants *visible*. Simultaneously, it claims how the objectivity of film technology and, by the same token, of the Revolution could bring an end to the peasant's ignorance. As Chanan observes, the scene recalls European audiences at the turn of the century when encountering film for the first time. The documentary's colonialist depiction of the countryside reveals the power relationships that the Revolution perpetuated in its political and ideological conceptualization of the relationship between the city and the countryside. When Chanan argues against a colonialist reading of this documentary he states that the transformative power of this scene was in the fact that the audience could identify with the children's discovery of film by becoming aware of their own viewing experience. Yet, the filmmaker's construction of the children's moment of amusement as 'pure' and 'legible' expressions of their "ignorance" aimed to represent the objective function of the Revolution's film technology by rendering the peasant's *otherness* as an objective revolutionary visible experience. Ultimately, through the representation of the peasant's experience as backwardness, the documentary could "reveal" the Revolution as a phenomenon of the present.

The relationship between documentary and images of working classes in the cities and peasant life in the countryside can be tracked to the European pictorial tradition of realism and the critique of industrial societies towards the end of the 19th century. Film scholar Silke Panse writes that "the image of work has been tied with realism since

workers were first depicted in realist painting.[38] The French Revolution of 1848 instigated the right to work at the same time of the first realist peasant paintings: the right of peasants to be seen."[39] Similarly, documentary photography was linked to images of social and political denounce during the first decades of the 20th century. Yet, due to the 'faithful' value of the photograph's indexicality as a medium, photographs would not be conceived an expression of a social reality, but reality itself.[40] Through photography, images of poverty became expressions of an objective reality, a notion that was grounded in the relationship between technology and colonial forms of othering.

After WWII Italian filmmakers began to set their films away from the studios. The countryside and the space of the working classes—to which documentary and photographic journalism were devoted—granted to this shift in Italian cinema the appellative *neorealism*. Later denominated as a trend more than a film movement Italian neorealist filmmakers thought to transform fiction genre by choosing to set the stories in the space of 'reality' that documentary embodied. Vincent Rocchio contests the idea that Italian neorealism constitutes a unity and argues that as a phenomenon it was moved by

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[38] Pense, Silke; "The Work of the Documentary Protagonist: The Material Labor of Aesthetics", *A companion to contemporary documentary film*; edited by Alexandra Juhasz and Alisa Lebow; Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Malden, MA : Wiley-Blackwell, 2015. [p. 169]

[39] Ibid. [p.170]

[40] Here I refer to Peirce's *Theory of Signs* where he develops a theory about the relationship between a sign and its mark, which is thought to represent it indexically. Photography, as a medium that fixes an image is considered an indexical media. Through this theory, photography, and documentary as well, acquires their 'truth-value'.

diverse ideologies, narratives and aesthetics that reveal the social anxieties permeating Italian society during the post-war years.[41]

Considering Rocchio's argument we might conclude that if Italian neorealism reflects the rupture of genre categories between fiction and non-fiction it was not necessarily a break from bourgeois values. It was the resulting product of a society's struggle to come to terms with the effects of war, represented through documentary 'reality', and fiction film as art and entertainment. Neorealism had a strong impact in the work of Julio Garcia Espinoza, a Cuban filmmaker who studied film in Italy during the 1950s and later became vice-president of ICAIC. For his 1956 film *El Mégano* (1965) Espinoza tried to imitate the style of neorealist films by using peasants as actors that enacted a plot about a peasant family's hardships and poverty. The film, which used elements of documentary, sought to denounce the injustices of Batista's government. Yet, because of its excessive investment with fictional elements, it ended up not only reproducing stereotypical images of peasants as miserable but rendering their hardship and poverty fictional. (Fig. 3) The dilemma of Espinoza was how to create a political film about social injustice that could still have artistic ends, a quality that documentary as a genre linked to journalism and to objective reporting, failed to convey.

Precisely because of its truth claim, documentary as a genre had been conceived within a regime of visibility of which low and marginal classes were often the subject. Linked to the news reportage documentary was deemed outside the realm of the aesthetic.

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[41] Rocchio, Vincent; *Cinema of anxiety: a psychoanalysis of Italian neorealism*; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.

In his infamous book *The Redemption of Physical Reality* published in 1960, German exiled critic and film theorist Siegfried Kracauer suggests that documentary's "penchant for actuality" alienated and disconnected stories and subjects from their representation.[42] For Kracauer this prevented the documentary from having aesthetic qualities and move towards emotions. Precisely because documentary's direct engagement with the subjects and experiences it records the question of aesthetics political, hence propaganda. Unlike fiction, which had aesthetic ends. According to Kracauer, documentary was limited as an aesthetic category precisely because it was invested with "raw material reality". Kracauer's medium specificity argument relegates documentary, as a photographic medium, to a concept of reality that is distinct from aesthetic experience. Yet, contradictorily, he argues that it is precisely through its investment with "raw material reality" that documentary can convey aesthetic experience.

It is out of these contradictions that "imperfect cinema" becomes the official aesthetic of Cuban film in 1968 when Julio Garcia Espinoza—the director of that pre-Revolutionary documentary *El Mégano*—coins the term in his pseudo-manifesto *Imperfect Cinema*.[43] The *imperfection* of this cinema, its lack of aesthetic qualities was for Garcia Espinoza, a reflection of material reality. And while an aesthetics of imperfection was conceived as a political position against U.S. notions of sophistication and modernization, it continued to advance the idea that the non-aesthetic was

[42] Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of film: The redemption of physical reality*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1997.

[43] MacKenzei, Scott; *Film manifestos and global cinema cultures: a critical anthology*; For an imperfect cinema/ Julio García Espinosa; Berkeley: University of California Press, c2014.

represented through the visibly objective reality. Although the revolutionary government claimed its right to power through its promise to transform social inequalities by 1968 this rhetoric was no longer viable. Claiming imperfection as an official aesthetics turned the subjects, spaces, ideas and behaviors that marked Cuba's underdevelopment—mainly peasant life and blackness—as the visible marks of the country's incompleteness. As the canonical Cuban fiction film *Memories of underdevelopment* (1968) suggests, Cuba's underdevelopment was never only an economic category but one gendered and racialized.[44]

THE DOCUMENTARY SUBJECT

In 1962 Nicolás Guillén Landrián had already taken his first steps into documentary. Shortly after joining ICAIC in 1959 and receiving technical training from Danish filmmaker Theodor Christensen, he produced two short documentary essays titled *Homenaje a Picasso* (1962) and *Congos Reales* (1962). Known as "the father of Danish documentary", the impact of Christensen in the work of Cuban documentary makers during this period is yet to be studied. Chanan mentions him only briefly to acknowledge his documentary *Ellas* (1964), rendering homage to Cuban women and their role within the process of the Revolution. At the core of Christensen's view on film, an online source assures, was the idea that "film should always be an action made from images, not

[44] In Tomás Gutiárres Aleza's fiction film *Memories of underdevelopment* (1968) a bourgeois intellectual looks at the post-Revolutionary Cuban context and reflects on its underdevelopment, which he sees reflected in a woman from a lower class who he meets and is forced to marry.

images depicting an action".[45] For Christensen, it was in editing that the structure of the film took shape. In *Café con leche* (2001) Landrián states that "the image was the most important thing, even more important than words."[46] This shared principle is reflected in Landrián's treatment of the image through the editing technique in some of his first documentary, which, like those of Christensen, refrain from dialogue. Landrián's approach to the image is marked also by his training as a painter. Closer to the film essay than to propagandistic narrations, Landrián's first documentaries were exercises of contemplation. Cuban film scholar Dean Luis Reyes describes Landrián's films from this period as *reflective* or *reflexivo*.[47] Based on Bill Nichols' documentary categories, in documentary essay "the emphasis shifted from convincing an audience of a particular point of view or approach to a problem, to the representation of a personal, clearly subjective view of things. From persuasion the emphasis shifts to expression."[48] Thus, one could say that Landrián's documentary practice was primarily inscribed within two aesthetic principles: contemplation and expression.

Towards 1965, Landrián travelled with a small film crew to Baracoa where he created *Ociel del Toa* (1965). Baracoa is a small town located on one of the most remote and hard to access area on the East side of the country. This documentary expresses the

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[45] Information about the Danish filmmaker is scarce. Chanan acknowledges his presence at ICAIC briefly. The cited quote appears on the website Culture Nordic.

[46] Zayas, *Café*.

[47] Reyes, Dean Luis, *La Mirada bajo asedio: El documental reflexive cubano*, Instituto Cubano del libro, Editorial Oriente, Cuba, 2003.

[48] Nichols, Bill; *Introduction to documentary*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. [p. 14]

subjectivity and richness of the peasant's experiences and activities. Landrián's camera assistant remembers that they would spend time living at the village where they were going to shoot and got to know the people there.[49] Instead of formulating a narrative to construct the subject *other*, Landrián implicates the subject filmed within the making of the film itself. Inverting thus, the power relationship between an urban middle-class audience located mostly in Havana and the peasant in the countryside, and between filmmaker and subject filmed by making the filmmaking process and the documentary itself a shared creative experience.[50]

Cuban documentary filmmaker Manuel Zayas contends that Landrián's most important legacy to the younger generations of documentary makers who have been exposed to his works is his ethics when filming people.[51] Filming against the images of misery through which the revolutionary government established itself as savior, or the paternalistic view of peasants as debtors or beneficiary, Landrián disrupts essentialist constructions of the *other*. In films such as *Un Festival* (1963) and *En un barrio Viejo* (1963) the filmmaker renders homage to popular culture and creates a poetic portray of one of the oldest neighborhoods in Havana and its people. In *Los del baile*, (1965) the editing technique enters in dialogue with the textures in the music of popular Afro-Cuban

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[49] Ramos, Julio; "Filmar Con Guillén Landrián. Entrevista a Livio Delgado." *la Fuga* 15 (2013).

[50] An example of this is an intertitle that appears in *Ociel del Toa* reading "People in Havana should see this". The intertitle raised questions but Landrián stateed that the phrase came from one of the peasants participating in the making of the documentary, which is why the filmmaker decided to include it.

[51] Ramos, "Cine".

musician Pello el Afrokán. (Fig. 4) This documentary was censored and Landrián went back to Baracoa in 1966 to make what was his last documentary there.[52]

By 1967 the revolutionary government was already facing strong criticisms for its repressive measurements against different groups and practices considered counter-revolutionary. This lead to an increase on policies and bureaucracies in cultural institutions that were constantly policed by appointed government watchdogs. ICAIC was not exception. Santiago Álvarez had risen to popularity for his propagandistic films attacking the U.S.' imperialistic and racist politics and became the government's chief official documentary maker. After Landrián's return to ICAIC in 1967, the new working conditions at the Popular Enyclopedia—then directed by Álvarez—represented, as Manuel Zayas has stated, "the opposite of what he had been doing."[53]

Landrián had entered the department where political propaganda was produced and was to follow the prescriptive formal structure of the didactic documentary. The production process of the didactic documentaries was mostly in solitary, and involved assembling archival photographs and footage of practices, processes or events they covered. Cuban didactic documentaries, as Chanan observes, were organized through a system of thematic categorizations. Thus, although they varied in theme the structure had always to remain the same. For his propagandistic documentaries Álvarez had some 'freedom'. He could divert from the regular structure of the didactic documentary as to

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[52] There is no knowledge on the reasons for censoring Landrián's documentary *Los del baile* (1965) but some scholars assured that documentaries figuring dance, music or popular and black culture were not well received by official authorities.

[53] Ramos, "Cine".

imbue the political message with a subjectivity that the didactic formal structure did not allow.

Didactic documentaries, also known as popular science films, were first produced in France and Germany in 1897. They dealt mostly with "scientific research, the lives and work of scientists and the significance of various scientific discoveries for mankind."[54] After during the 1920s they became popularized in the Soviet Union though the efforts of V. Lenin who "called for the maximum possible use of public film lectures dealing with various problems of science and technology."[55] The didactic documentary mode was founded upon a scientific ideology that by the end of the 19th century claimed to scientifically prove racial inferiority and superiority. The positivism with which Western ideology imbued technology was echoed through revolutionary rhetoric of production. Thus, although agricultural plans such as the Havana Greenbelt thought to move away from industrial forms of mass production through the collectivization of labor, the value of labor was put in its productivity, on production as a value.

For his canonical documentary *Now!* (1965) Álvarez used photographs and footage showing police violence against black people in the U.S. This documentary has been praised for its montage technique where the continuous movement of images is said to echo the beat pattern of Lena Horne's song with the same title. Horne was herself a civil right movement activist and had created the song as a hymn of protest that claimed political change *now*. The fast pace of the images that appear in crescendo motion build

[54] The Free Dictionary. Popular Science Films. http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Popular+Science+Films

[55] Ibid.

tension and reach a climatic point where the violence in the images is echoed by the movement of the shots. The subjectivity that Álvarez tries to convey is that of the song's urgency. Yet, the aesthetics of violence that the montage evokes removes the experience of violence from subjectivities to the shots of a machine gun. (Fig. 5)

The montage is unclear in whether it wants to convey violence, urgency or both. Thus, it fails to situate violence and its effects in the experience of a subject, outside of the film's message. The documentary was meant to voice Cuba's support for black liberation movements. Yet, it ends up making a spectacle of images of violence against black people by removing the particularities of these experiences from its subjects. Thus, becoming merely propagandistic. In *Coffea Arabiga*, Landrián critiques both the scientific and propagandistic of modes of revolutionary film parctices by presenting the aesthetics of technology as simulation, as an effect that acts upon the senses but removes all subjectivity.

In one sequence, the voice of Ingeniero Bernaza can be heard explaining the process of coffee production in a methodical way. His speech is unaffected, constant, dispassionate, as if dictating a document. The sound of a typewriter reproduces the dictation as letters and words appear on the screen corresponding with the dictation. There is humor in this sequence, which almost appears to reference the famous statement Nietzsche wrote on his typewriter "Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts."[56] Initially, the pace of the dictation appears to match the typewriter's word generation

[56] Kittler, Friedrich; *Gramophone, film, typewriter*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, c1999.

speed. Voice, typewriter and text blend in a rhythmic pace. At one point words and letter that appear on the screen do not correspond with the speech. Suddenly the type writer appears to be operating alone, in automatic. The words on the screen do not match the voice and the machine that reproduces the dictation appears to be a machine that first produces letters in an absurd order, and then begins to spell out propaganda *Beat up the yankie* and *pin pon out, down with the traitor.* (Fig. 6)

The objectivity that the scientific speech acquires through the accuracy and efficiency of the machine is disrupted through the revelation of the machine's contingent operations. The relationship between speech and text is disjunctive, suggesting the emptiness of speech when it becomes mechanical discourse. This machine that operates by itself now reproduces propagandistic content. Yet, the words do not appear to emerge from the typewriter. They appear emerge from the center of the screen and quickly growing bigger, as if it was closer to the viewer. The speed with which the text appears re-creates a bullet traveling and impacting a surface. This speed effect recalls the montage style Alvarez' used for *Now!* where the word and image appear on the screen as if imitating shotguns. However, Landrián does not use Álvarez' style but renders it a trope. The scientific and propagandistic styles structuring the didactic documentary are revealed as empty ideologies, as machines that communicate words and information as disembodied content, without a subjectivity. The subjects disappear through the 'objectivity' of the machine and the sensorial experience becomes that of the technological experience.

This machine aesthetics would not only displace the presence of a subject—the one making the film or one appearing in the film—by situating the film's temporality in the technological, but it seeks to transfer to the film its 'progressiveness' through its mechanical quality. The irony in this sequence emerges through the paralleling of typewriter, machine gun and film technology through the aesthetic logic of the machine. Thus, the sequence reveals how the didactism and propagandism of the film as a space of science and army where the Revolution had situated the modern, might only be a simulacrum.[57] The objectivity that both typewriter and machine gun grant revolutionary speech would then functioned to alienate any possible subjectivity or referent outside the logic of the machine.

Precisely because documentary emerged from a notion of political and social objectivity as a system for claiming 'truth', to strip it from its Western philosophical models was to turn it into a personal and social experience that decentered the very notion of a truth. Documentary could in fact always decenter the space of truth as it could convey intersubjective experiences where the political as a phenomenon of the present, could be situated in the space and time of the viewer and subject viewed. Like Landrián, Afro-Cuban female documentary maker, and only woman director at ICAIC, Sara Gómez began working at the Documentary Department in 1959. They can be considered innovators in the documentary genre precisely because their practices carved a way outside of a revolutionary regime of visibility that furthered Western ideological and

[57] Baudrillard, Jean; *Simulacra and simulation* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, c1994.

aesthetic models of representation. Their practice destabilized the political and social objectivity that the Revolution claimed and its temporal and spatial ordering of experience through a conceptualization of the documentary as a genre capable of situating subjects and spaces in the temporality of the present. Landrián's poetic exploration of the life in the countryside manifests in documentaries where it is notable the absence of audio commentary over the images. Peasants are represented outside of the stereotypes through which they were often depicted as either debtors or beneficiaries of the Revolution.

Landrián's documentary *Ociel del Toa* (1965) is not the only one during this period that concentrates on a single subject. (Fig. 7) Yet, the ways in which the documentary implicates the subjects filmed within the film's aesthetic experience is unprecedented.[58] Cuban film historian Dean Luis Reyes writes about a sequence in *Coffea Arabiga* where young peasant girl dances and appears to be directly looking at the camera. Regarding the gaze of a peasant girl in a sequence of *Coffea Arabiga,* Reyes writes that "by presenting the viewer with gaze of filmed subject Landrián interpellates us. He disalienates us as spectators twisting the social productivity of the illusionist-image towards a human and familiar environment, that favors the identification of the other with oneself, instead of as a distant illusion."[59] (Fig. 8) It is through this gesture of bridging temporalities and spaces to situate the subjectivity of the peasant girl as an experience of the countryside that Landrián's documentaries from this period sought to

[58] Sánchez, *Romper.*

[59] Reyes, *La Mirada.* [p. 56]

transform the image of subjects *othered* by addressing a film audience that was urban and middle class, for whom peasants existed in a historical time and in the abstract space of the countryside.

This attention to a single subject, as Sánchez Gonzáles observes, is rare in Cuban documentaries from this period. Yet, it appears again in the personal and autobiographical documentary by Sara Gómez *Guanabacoa: Crónica de una familia* (1966) where she interviews her own parents—a middle class black family from Guanabacoa—to bring to light the problem of racial discrimination and the divisions within the black community that stemmed from centuries of racial segregation. Gómez' documentary is unique precisely because she addresses the problem of racism directly, a topic that documentary makers avoided. Through this personal investigation of her family history Gómez questions her parents and asks them to confront how their class values had lead them to reject their blackness. Gómez' complex and difficult personal reflection is unprecedented in Cuban cinema. Not only she broke the tabú of addressing racism by questioning her own family but by doing so she called attention to the role of the individual within the revolution and most importantly, the role of filmmaker maker within his own political and social practice. The documentary was censored but Gómez' critique of racism continued being a constant theme throughout her practice.

The works by these filmmakers dislocated the space of the political from being an ideology, to being a social and relational practice. Through their documentary practice they sought to shape the relationship between subjects filmed and viewers by implicating their own presence as filmmakers with that of the people they filmed. Thus, the distance

between viewer and subject viewed would be intersubjective and relational instead of dialectical and hierarchical. As a result, the relationship between State and subjects—conceived paralleled to that of the filmmaker practices and subjects filmed—would have also been brought into question. Their practice called attention to the politics of spectatorship, considering that the film audience was composed mostly of an urban middle class centered in Havana. But most importantly, it questioned the politics and ethics of filmmaking as a practice composed, in its majority, of well-educated middle class white males.

Landrián and Gómez expressed that they were never interested in fiction films, which can be interpreted as a political position. They could have rejected fiction as a genre that constructed stereotypes and failed to treat complex social problems such as racial and gender inequality in the contemporary context. Film scholar Haseenah Ebrahim writes that "in Cuban Cinema, racial oppression could be acknowledged if explored as a historical occurrence, a problem of the past."[60] Afro-Cuban filmmaker Sergio Giral, produced various fiction films that treated the topic of race exclusively through films about slavery. Giral's films reproduced rendered the black subject to a past that implied a distance from a present where he/she was liberated from slavery and exploitation. On the other hand, documentary situated subjects in the present of space and time, not as representation but as a presence in the field of visibility where revolutionary rhetoric inscribed revolutionary subjects.

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[60] Ebrahim, Haseenah. "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema." *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe / European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 82.82 (2007): 107–118.

Considering the statement figuring in the epigraph of this chapter along the lines of the context I have outlined Landrián's avant-garde film practice can be situated within historical film practices invested with the conceptualization of the art making process itself as a critical and political practice but most importantly, with the formulation of a new and unique cinematic experience as the product of a new social and aesthetic experience of the present. The rejection of fiction by both Landrián and Gómez could then be understood as a political gesture not only against this a-temporal and historized rendition of subjects but against the very stereotypes that it produced as a result. By remaining in the past, fiction was limited to treating social problems in the present. Film historians who have written about how Landrián and Gómez's bent genre categories have focused on how they disrupt the genre fiction and real, ignoring that what they were bending was the temporalities through which revolutionary fiction films situated and ordered subjects.

In fact, Gómez' only fiction film *One way or another* (*De cierta manera)* is considered to have transgressed film genres and this is precisely because the story of the film unfolds amid her own sociological investigation of the politics of gender, race and class in the context of post-Revolutionary Cuba. This is probably the most important film produced in Cuba, and one that proved to be a great challenge for Gómez, who died of an asthma attack before completing it. The impact of this film in canonical Cuban filmmaker Tomás Guitérrez Alea lead him to create a very similar film titled *Up to one point (Hasta cierto punto)*, which he dedicated to Gómez. In the case of Landrián, Dylon Robbins analyses how in his didactic documentary *Desde La Habana 1969! recordar*, the

filmmaker creates a tension between documentary and fiction to situate his own position as a filmmaker within the critique of the documentary.[61]

There were only a few other documentaries that dealt with race. Eduardo Manet's *El Negro*, Néstor Almendros' *Ritmo de Cuba* and José Massip's *Historia de un ballet* (Suite Yoruba). These documentaries were not censored but they do not deal with racial discrimination nor they present black subjects in the present context. Manet's documentary presents a historical narrative about racial discrimination in Cuba from slavery up to the Revolution while Almendros and Massip's documentaries present Afro-Cuban music and dances folklorized and a-temporal, in the style of a 'ballet', as a performance for an audience in what seems like a television setting. By removing these performances from their public or social environment they are not only represented as traditional, fixed and a-temporal forms of cultural manifestations but they are stripped from the social context where they exist. This attempt to devoid Afro-Cuban culture from its blackness, meaning, from the context where blackness manifests as a social experience is another manifestation of the ways in which racism operated through the ordering, repressing and censoring of certain experiences.

Odette Casamayor's analysis of how Gómez and Landrián's sought to disrupt the stereotypes through which the Revolution had constructed the role of Afro-Cubans, reveals how the official rhetoric of race was resisted and contested by these filmmakers who struggled to reconcile their position as workers of the State while remaining critical

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[61] Dylon, Robbins, Haddu, Miriam, Page, Joanna, ed. *Visual Synergies in Fiction and Documentary Film from Latin America*. Palgrave Macmillian, New York, 2009.

of discriminatory attitudes and practices. Ebrahim analyses how some documentaries and films produced around the same period treated race or Afro-Cuban themes through the same stereotypes that Casamayor notes.[62] I coincide with Ebrahim in that the reason for the ostracism of these filmmakers came as the result of their critical position towards racism and their insistence in addressing race. The conflicting position of Landrián and Gómez—as workers of an official institution and filmmakers who were critical to their social and political environment— reflects through their documentaries, which constantly slip out of the official discourse where film practices were inscribed, to go in search of subjects and experiences.[63]

Landrián's absence from major publications on the history of Cuban cinema and his ostracism from what are considered the canonical cinematic works produced in Cuba during the decade of the 1960s, call for a re-evaluation of the politics underlying historiographical practices in Cuba and a re-assessment of the frameworks for studying this period. It was not until the 1990s that these 'forgotten' Afro-Cuban filmmakers from the 1960s began to be rescued, and only until recently they have become recognized as important figures within Cuban documentary practices from the 1960s.[64] In 2003, a young film student named Alexandra Muller, produced a documentary titled *Where is*

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[62] Ebrahim, "Sarita" [p. 5]

[63] Landrián and Gómez were of the few documentary makers who created series of documentaries away from Havana. Landrián's created a trilogy about Baracoa and Gómez spent time filming what was also a documentary trilogy in Nuevo Gerona, or The Island of Youth, a small island off to the South of Cuba.

[64] Sánchez González's book about the Documentary Movement of the 1960s in Cuba is the first one to acknowledge the centrality of Gómez and Landrián within the development of documentary practices.

Sara Gómez?(Dónde está Sara Gómez?), a question that can be used to also question Landrián's absence. The next chapter is invested with the dynamics of absence and presence in *Coffea Arabiga* through an analysis of the metanarratives and decentering gestures that Landrián performs to call attention to the process and politics behind the production of meaning and the representation of subjects underlying the Havana Greenbelt plan.

Coffea Arabiga The Politics and Poetics of Representation

"A day will come when the one below will be above once the one above gets to be below. Below I dream and work."[65] Landrián recites these verses in the 2005 documentary *The end but not the end* (*El Fin Pero No Es El Fin*) (2003), appearing among his paintings at a small apartment in Miami, Florida.[66] The lines belong to the poem *When I came to this world* written in 1947 by The Poet, an epithet used by the filmmaker when referring to his uncle, Cuba's National Poet Nicolás Guillén.[67] By recalling and performing the voice of the The Poet during this interview, Landrián makes poetry an incidence that turns speech into a reflective mode organizing language and thought. In the poem, the rhyming of the words *dream* and *work* (sueño y trabajo) with the word *below* (abajo) disrupts a repetitive flow that splits space in two. This separation does not disappear, but is transformed once the space *below* (abajo) is reclaimed by the poet who turns it into one single poetic space. "The national problem has always seemed to me quite hostile" states Landrián at one point during the film.[68] "Not for being a problem of racism per se, but one of the geography of the island, which I have always thought to be quite dramatic. Long, as if leading to something, yet, cut in two extremes."

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[65] Ya estará el de abajo arriba cuando el de arriba esté abajo. Abajo, sueño y trabajo. (My own translation to English)

[66] Egusquiza Zorrilla, Jorge. *El Fin Pero No Es El Fin*. Coincident Productions & Village Films, 2005. Film.

[67] Guillén, Nicolás; *Obra Poética*, Tomo Ib (1922-1958), Editorial Letras Cubanas, Cuba, 1958

[68] Egusquiza Zorrilla, *El fin*.

In Landrián's poetic reflection, the spatial dualism that emerges through the island's physical shape pre-determines and inscribes national divisions. Almost forty years before the filmmaker reflected on this topic, his work displayed similar concerns. In Chapter 2 I develop an analytical and historical framework to discuss how in *Coffea Arabiga* Landrián reveals the tensions behind a race-blind discourse of national integration and de-centers a revolutionary regime of visibility by reclaiming the presence of blackness as a political, historical and social identity. Through an exploration of the dynamics of race in its spatial and temporal dimensions, Landrián conceptualizes his documentary practice as a system of historical and contextual de-centerings that reclaimed identities and subjectivities that revolutionary visual and ideological rhetoric rendered invisible. This gesture, I argue, calls attention to the colonial legacies permeating the politics of representation underlying the Havana Greenbelt plan of coffee production which simultaneously concealed and perpetuated internal racial and regional divisions.

SPACE

The Havana Greenbelt agricultural plan was conceived by the government to be a national effort to affirm Cuba's economic independency. As early as 1960, the Cuban government began to develop massive plans of production that would also function to further national unity.[69] The Havana Greenbelt plan, which required the mobilization of thousands of Havana citizens towards the agricultural fields on the outskirts of the city,

[69] Scarpaci, Joseph L., Robertp Segre, Mario Coyula. *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

hoped to transform unequal relationships of production and consumption between urban and rural areas in the country. As architect Roberto Segre noted, thanks to this plan Havana was going to stop being "the image of the parasite city, the 'desk city', the passive city."[70] Since Havana represented what Henri Lefevre calls an "urban, industrial and technological society" the plan of production aimed to transform the ideological landscape of the city.[71]

Havana was economically dependent on the countryside. A disproportionate relationship that had its origins in the colonial period when the topography and geographic position of the country conditioned and determined the functions of each region. Whereas Havana was founded as a port city that connected Europe with Continental America, the East side of the country with its fertile inlands became the site where sugar plantations were later installed. Havana became the official political center of the country towards the end of the XIX century, after the Republic was founded in 1902 and when discourses of national identity solidified through internal reactions against U.S. occupation.

After the revolutionary government took over, the political center continued being Havana, which became the space for revolutionary performance, a stage where what Paul

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[70] Segre, Roberto; *Arquitectura y urbanismo de la Revolucion cubana*. Habana, Pueblo y Educacion,1989. [p. 64]

[71] Lefebvre, Henri; *Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City.* Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012

Connerton calls "commemorations ceremonies" would take place.[72] With the Havana Greenbelt plan the revolutionary government claimed to transform the unequal economic relationship between city and countryside and thus eliminate the racial and regional divisions maintained through a system of exploitation. Fidel Castro even urged habaneros to "learn about the hardships and exploitation that peasants underwent", which he thought were being eliminate through the massive mobilization.[73] With the mobilization of habaneros to the countryside, the image of the capital as an industrial and modern center would be transformed into a pastoral and agricultural land.

The media campaign launched by the government focused on the mobilization of city dwellers and the whole event became, fundamentally, a critique to U.S. society's consumerist culture, of which Havana was thought to be a chapter. Thus, the Havana Greenbelt embodied a series of contradictions through the government's attempt to create a performance of political participation that enacted the transformation of class ideology as opposed to U.S. class ideology. To display a revolutionary change of consciousness city dwellers, and particularly white middle class woman, had to represent their ideologically deviancy from the ideology of U.S. white middle class. Thus, Havana residents performed class transgression and since agricultural workers and peasants were 'no longer exploited', they were rendered invisible.

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[72] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember,* Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

[73] Chase, Michelle; "The Country and the City in the Cuban Revolution", Colombia Internacional 73, enero a junio 2011.

During his speech in May Day Celebration of 1961 at Revolution square Fidel Castro praised those present and parading as "the citizens who worked, produced, and created" and the ones who were not present as "the citizens who lived without working or producing."[74] Participation in production plans became a way to perform political consensus. After 1959 democratic elections were terminated in Cuba. Thus, a way to represent the government's legitimate power position was through the performance of *lo revolucionario*.[75] The Havana Greenbelt would craft a regime of visibility of *lo revolucionario* as it manifested through political events and massive mobilizations. In some occasions, the government would bring peasants from the countryside to participate in marches and events.[76] Imbuing the experience of *lo revolucionario,* a political identity defined in opposition to U.S. class ideology, with *lo cubano*, an idea of *lo nacional* that remained a folkloric and stereotypical construction of subalternity.

The performance of *lo revolucionario* as "a new political identity" was centered on the urban space of Havana while, in the national imaginary, the historical and cultural experience of *lo cubano* was symbolically located in the countryside as something a-temporal and peripheral. National unity was then situated in the contradictory process of erasing the marks of backwardness that the countryside embodied through the enactment

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[74] Catsro, Fidel; May Day Celebration (1961): Cuba is a Socialist Nation, May 1, 1961. https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1961/05/01.htm

[75] Guerra, Lillian; *Visions of power in Cuba : revolution, redemption, and resistance, 1959-1971;* "The reel, real and hyper-real Revolution: Self-Representation and Political Performance in Everyday Life", Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, c2012. [p. 332]

[76] Chase, "The Country".

of revolutionary identity, as a political position against a class ideology. Thus, revolutionary identity was conceived as a class ideology that was not only spatially but racially constructed. French sociologist and scholar Lorraine Karnoouh has noted that "from a perspective of its racial dimensions, the contrapunteo urban-regional between Havana and Santiago de Cuba reflects, in exemplary manner, the contradictions inherent to the issue of identity in Cuba".[77] These contradictions, underlying the concept of national identity within a largely divided country, lead to countless attempts to bring *lo cubano* —associated to "lo Afro" and "lo campesino" in the national imaginary— into the city, which due to its media and political centeredness was where the experience of *lo revolucionario* was inscribed. The Havana Greenbelt and the didactic documentary that Landrián was commissioned to create operated within this schizoid revolutionary nationalist or rather nationalizing discourse as a form of erasing subjectivities and identities that could not be situated within the class identity that revolutionary identity embodied.

Coffea Arabiga begins with a historical narrative that disrupts a myth of origin about the place where coffee was first cultivated in Cuba. (Fig. 9) The initial inter-titles, denoting disbelief and disagreement rather than a stable fact, argue that although coffee is *supposedly* (se supone) and *said* (se dice) to have been planted for the first time in Wajay —a town located in the outskirts of Havana— the origins of Cuba's coffee growth boom is historically centered in the region of Santiago de Cuba. This gesture calls attention to

[77] Karnoouh, Lorraine; "Lo "afro" and el imaginario nacional cubano y el contrapunteo caribeno entre La Habana y Santago de Cuba", ed. Avila Dominguez, Freddy; Perez Montfort, Ricardo; Rinaudo, Christian; *Circulaciones culturales: Lo afrocaribeno entre Cartagena, Veracruz y La Habana*, Publicaciones de la casa chata, Mexico, 2011. [p. 102]

the legacies of a colonial writing of history within the Havana Greenbelt plan of production and thus suggesting that the latter might repeat a historical and practical error. The filmmaker proposes a rectification and a re-writing of coffee's myth of origin to Santiago de Cuba by decentering the act of *planting* and emphasizing the process of *growing*. In the transition from planting to growing Landrián calls attention to Western readings of colonization as an act of *marking* a territory by proposing to consider instead a *process* that determined specific relationships and experiences around the production of coffee.

Photographs of the town of Wajay are quickly replaced by the ones of the Museum of the Big Rock (Museo de la Gran Piedra) in Santiago de Cuba, the historical site of La Isabélica, a coffee plantation from the colonial period. (Fig. 9) An intertitle reads los franceses (the french) while photographs of the colonial house's domestic interior appear in quick progression. There is no human presence in them except for the portrait of a white European man wearing 19th century attire. Yet the non-diegetic sound of a squeaky door, footsteps and a piano suggest a ghostly presence. Another inter-tile reads: the blacks in the coffee field as work force (los negros en el cafetal como mano de obra) followed by a photograph of the coffee factory and a smeared portrait of a man with Chinese features, who is not identified except for a headband suggesting he might be a slave. The intertitles evoke dialogical voices and one of them suddenly suggests a conflicting state of disbelief and shock: what? (cómo?) the blacks?! (los negros?!), which is answered with a confirmatory yes! the blacks (sí! los negros!). (Fig. 9) Photographs of a bell and open shackles appear as a voice chanting in an African language is followed by

a complex drum rhythmic pattern preluding the footage of an Afro-Cuban secular genre of dance and drumming called Tumba Francesa.

The sequence unfurls through a series of decentering gestures that complicate colonial narratives while implying their persistence. Landrián decenters Havana as the site where the government centers the agricultural plan of production, and turns our gaze to Santiago, the place where coffee has a social, political and cultural history. Thus, opening a slit through the official regime of visibility of the Havana Greenbelt to consider the colonial history of coffee production as a system of exploitation that the rhetoric of production displaces through its emphasis in economic productivity. With this initial gesture, the film complicates the location of a national body and a national subject which the rhetoric of the Havana Greenbelt locates in the act of mobilization towards the city's periphery. Furthermore, by re-directing the gaze towards Santiago de Cuba Landrián reveals the irony behind the agricultural plan, which claims to eliminate racial and regional distances by yet re-centering Havana within the revolutionary regime of visibility.

The juxtaposition of non-diegetic sound and photographic archive, presented as 'evidence' within the sequential narrative, creates a tension between the still's fixity and a ghostly presence. The photographic progression's sudden transit towards footage, towards movement, breaks with an institutional presentation of *History* that reproduces a teleological narrative according to a dialectical colonial order. There is tension in the ways the photographs are presented within the categories french and black, as if Landrián wanted to question the elusiveness and open quality of the signified that escapes grand

historical narratives. For example, the man with Chinese features disrupts the category *blacks*, by problematizing black as a racial category and pointing to the ways in which it is used to inscribe slave. Furthermore, the smear on the photograph appears as an evidence of something that exists outside the image, or rather, outside of the History that the museographic images supposedly narrate. (Fig. 9) At the juncture between sound and museographic objects, photographs and documentary footage, historical forms of representation and the representation of History are dismantled. The non-diegetic sound evokes a presence in the present, disrupting the museum objects that exist frozen in the past as a form of organizing spatial and temporal experiences, suggesting that the past resists forms of ordering precisely because it never exists outside of the present. The past, Landrián seems to suggest exists only in the way we experience the present.

The sudden appearance of documentary footage following the historical symbols of freedom, dislocates the narrative of freedom from a past by linking it to the present of the documentary footage and, by the same token, of the Tumba Francesa. (Figs. 10) The disembodied and removed teleological account of a History where coffee production is inscribed suddenly unfolds into a moment in the present signified by the documentary footage. It is in the transition from fixed image to movement, from a colonial ordering of experience to the multisensorial experience of the Tumba Francesa where Landrián inscribes blackness as an experience not yet *in* the present but *of* the present.

The Tumba Francesa embodies the idea of syncretism and cultural hybridity through which Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz characterized Cuban culture.[78] However, Ortiz' notion of syncretism and hybridity conceives Afro-Cubannes and blackness through fixed codes and practices that are "integrated" within Cuban culture, in other words, within what is not "Afro". But the Tumba Francesa represents neither a mix nor an adaptation of African tradition. It embodies a point of contact between spaces and subjects determined by the experience of blackness, an expression of cultural processes that emerge and merged through forms of resistance. This secular dance and music style was brought to the region of Santiago by African slaves who emigrated to Cuba with French plantation owners who were running away from the Haitian Revolution.[79]

The Tumba Francesa is tied to the history of coffee, as it was brought to Santiago de Cuba by the same French plantation owners, but also to the experience of blackness as something that continued, given that after the abolition of slavery Tumba Francesa societies became established in Santiago de Cuba. Thus, in its contemporaneity the Tumba Francesa represents an expression of blackness as a political, cultural and social experience. The relationship between coffee and the secular dance is established through a collapse of temporalities, which seek to reclaim the relationship between the experience

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[78] Ortiz, Fernando; *Contrapunto Cubano del tabaco y el azúcar (advertencia de sus contrastes agrarios, económicos, históricos y sociales, su etnografía y su tranculturación)*. Madrid: Cátedra : Música Mundana Maqueda, 2002.

[79] Zobeyda, Ramos Venereo; "Haitian Traditions in Cuba". In Kuss, Malena. *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean:* Performing the Caribbean experience. *An Encyclopedic History, Vol. 2*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007. [p. 265–280]

of blackness and the history of coffee production, which the Tumba Francesa contains and represents in its contemporaneity.

The footage of the Tumba Francesa decenters the Havana-centric revolutionary regime of visibility established through the Havana Greenbelt and places doubt on its rhetoric of production and national integration by locating the experience of blackness in the historical present of the Tumba Francesa that the filmmaker represents through his own documentary practice. By locating the Tumba Francesa in the present context of the social, in a specific space and time, Landrián reclaimed the social space of blackness within the revolutionary regime of visibility, while simultaneously revealing its absence; thus, resisting and critiquing the invisibility of race promoted through revolutionary race-blind rhetoric that simultaneously claimed its integration.

The footage of the Tumba Francesa not only re-claims a political space of blackness but also the political space of women's agency. (Fig. 10) A middle-aged black woman, dressed elegantly and moving gracefully through the interior space where the performance takes place, expresses solemnity and virtuosity. Other black woman play instruments and sing while the dancer seems to float, carrying the rhythm of the music with her whole body as she traverses the space. Through close-ups and camera movements the Tumba Francesa becomes an experience that implicates the viewer not yet as a spectator but as participant. The multisensory experience appears now as a political and cultural space of production. The way in which the film intentionally captures the dancer's solemn expression and virtuosity re-orders gender and racial

subjectivities within the revolutionary regime of visibility where the ideal subject is represented by white male figures.

This deviation from the revolutionary visual imaginary becomes even more evident on one of the montage sequences towards the end of the film. Landrián juxtaposes images of crowds cheering in Havana, a sign that reads Wajay—the supposed location of coffee's myth of origin—Fidel Castro walking towards a podium and the woman dancing at the Tumba Francesa. Through this juxtaposing of footage Landrián reveals a series of tensions. Havana is presented as the space where the cultural experience has become the political performance whereas in Santiago the political experience is the cultural performance. (Fig. 11) The decentering gesture from the beginning is towards the end of the film traversed by tension. And the film, as a political space of representation, has turned into a space of frantic struggle.

Being Landrián a black filmmaker and an official worker of the State he was expected to perform what Odette Casamayor calls the "new black subject", a category for describing the ways in which black people were imagined as protagonists within the Revolution as an alternative for Guevara's "New Man".[80] According to Casamayor "together, the "oppressed" and "barbarian" black prior to 1959 and the black "saved" by the new regime symbolize a greater construction of the Revolution."[81] Not only was Landrián's own work compromised by the pressures to reproduce revolutionary

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[80] Ernesto Guevara, *El Socialismo y El Hombre Nuevo*. 1st ed. México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1977.

[81] Casamayor, "Imagining" [p. 63]

discourse, but it was bound to function within a system that sought to eliminate blackness from the political regime of visibility in order to represent the overcoming of racism.

The schizoid logic of revolutionary politics of identity rendered the visibility of blackness at fault for fueling national division. Blackness understood as a reminder and remainder of racism, had to be erased to prevent any critique of the State's claim that the Revolution had eliminated racism. In the revolutionary regime of visibility blackness was represented according to the stereotypes Casamayor indicates, either as a historized political subject in the past, as in the figure of the slave or even the run-away slave (cimarrón), or a folklorized cultural identity, as in Afro-Cuban religious practices which would often be removed from their social contexts and presented ethnographically as assimilated and integrated traditions.

According to Alejandro de la Fuente, although the problem of racial discrimination was declared by Fidel Castro to be the revolution's "most difficult problem" in his speech of March 22nd of 1959, the issue was for the most part avoided. During the first years after the revolution, the government emitted a series of statement assuring that racial discrimination would be eliminated through the promotion of equality. Equal access to all jobs and the desegregation of public spaces were among the achievements followed by the nationalization of education, health care system and cultural institutions which guaranteed equal access by law. Right after the revolutionary government took power, Afro-Cuban intellectuals who integrated the Communist Party such as Landrián's uncle Nicolás Guillén, Blas Roca and Salvador García Aguero had sent a letter to the then president Manuel Urrutia requesting an "official

antidiscrimination policy" and "concrete steps to guarantee black's access to all jobs."[82] Despite the insistence of Afro-Cuban figures and intellectuals, who argued that failing to do so would mean a repetition of the post-Independence, this never took place.

According to Fuentes, the revolutionary government implemented a campaign against discrimination and implemented policies and regulations to desegregate public spaces and to ensure that blacks and whites had equal access to jobs. However, there were no laws that directly penalized racial discrimination. Castro's speech of February of 1962 declared that the revolution had "eradicated discrimination because of race or sex" along with class privileges. What followed was a process of silencing about racial discrimination being an unresolved problem. Fuentes writes that "If openly racist acts were deemed counterrevolutionary, attempts to debate publicly the limitations of Cuba's integration were likewise considered to be the enemy's work. As in the past, the ideal of racial brotherhood worked in complex, contradictory ways."[83]

Although the government's efforts towards integration had brought better economic and working conditions for black people across the country, the rhetoric of a race-blind society functioned to censor any mention of racism and any form of self-identification with blackness. Although religious ritual ceremonies had not yet banned, Afro-Cuban clubs and societies began to "disappear". De la Fuente's analysis of this first years of the Revolution reveals that it was a highly complex and contradictory moment

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[82] De la Fuente, Alejandro, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill & London. [p. 262]

[83] De la Fuente, *A Nation* [p. 265].

for Afro-Cuban intellectuals who supported the revolutionary government, its ideals and its cause, yet, they soon encounter censorship and silencing. Already by 1968, the year that Landrián creates *Coffea Arabiga* it was obvious that despite the government's support of black liberation movements in the U.S., the race-blind and integrationist rhetoric at home perpetuated the invisibility of blackness.

It is then possible to interpret this opening sequence as a destabilizing gesture of the revolutionary politics of representation and the Havana Greenbelt's rhetoric of production as a unifying principle. The Tumba Francesa re-affirmed the political, social and cultural presence of blackness in the present but its relationship with coffee was linked to the experience of resistance and erasure as one that was not only historical but contemporaneous. The title of the film re-constructs a geographic order where coffee and blackness are inscribed within a colonial hierarchical ordering of space as West vs. East. Yet, this tracing of a path that looks East, towards the Caribbean and towards Africa, urges to reconfigure spatial relationships within Cuba, as a national space.

Coffee arabica is a grain endemic from Ethiopia, and one of the first ones to be cultivated in the mountains of Santiago de Cuba via the colonial history of Haiti but most importantly, its liberation.[84] By locating coffee's origin to Africa, Landrián diverts the gaze towards the East, to Santiago de Cuba, to the Caribbean. Furthermore, the substitution of a *c* from Arabica to a *g* implicates the history of coffee in Arabia. It goes back to Mecca in 1511 when a governor prohibited the consumption of coffee because "it

[84] Perez de la Riva, Francisco, *El café; historia de su cultivo y explotación en Cuba*, La Habana, J. Montero, 1944.

made those who drunk into victims of incitements and oddness forbidden by law."[85] Coffee is then tied to a history of prohibition. Its material history embodied both a history of encounters and a history of erasures. By re-mapping a geography of coffee Landrián conceptualizes the East side of the country as a route, a gaze, a moving towards, rather than an a-temporal space where blackness is located, revoking Havana's political and visual centeredness.

This going or looking *towards* the East, instead of being in it, conceptualizes it as the political space where blackness as a political consciousness emerges. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilory calls this reversal journey of the route from West to the East "middle passage in reverse."[86] Recalling the journey that Martin R. Delany traces in his novel Blake where he travels from Cuba to Africa, Gilroy writes that was "undertaken as part of a grand plan to lead a revolutionary revolt in Cuba." This reversal of the journey calls attention to the politics of coffee itself and, by the same token, to the agricultural plan of production and its politics of representation. Landrián's reflection on the problem of national identity as a problem related to the dynamics of a national space is in the documentary conceived as a gaze *towards* a visual space represented in the production of a visual space. The East and the West are configured not only as spatial categories but as conceptual and political categories. Whereas Havana looked West, Santiago looked East, which questioned the production plan, politically, as a political mapping of space that re-

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[85] Brown, Daniel W., *A New Introduction to Islam*, 2nd ed., Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011

[86] Gilroy, Paul; *The Black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness*, London; New York : Verso, 1993 [p. 27]

inscribed colonial spatial hierarchies and, by the same token, its racial divisions. What is then the relationship between coffee, blackness and national identity if not a political relationship? Landrián seems to ask. And where would the political present of that relationships be if not in representation? If the Havana Greenbelt embodied the representation of Cuba's political present, then the filmmaker was asking the viewer to consider irony.

IDENTITY

In the critical text *How national culture emerged* from 1961, Afro-Cuban historian and intellectual Walterio Carbonell urges to re-center blackness as a political and cultural identity within the concept of national identity. He rejected the idea that nationalism was determined by class interests, reminding that in Cuba the war of independence had been fought by slaves and against slavery. Carbonell states that "nationalism is a political attitude, an emotional state, whereas class interest is an objective reality and not subjective like nationalism."[87] Carbonell argues that slaves conceived their own notion of nationalism distinct from that of their antagonists by stating that:

> "He [the slave], is by himself a producer of nationalism. Slaves had an ideology, an ideology radically opposed to that of the proslavery man characterized by his aspiration for freedom. For the slave it was harder to overcome his ideology and acquire national conscience compared to that of his antagonist, given that his ideology was not established in opposition to the development of production forces,

[87] Carbonell, Walterio, *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*, Habana, Ediciones Yaka, 1961.

he was in himself a production force wanting freedom. His role as producer of wealth and as a fighter against the retrograde forces of colonialism, made him the very essence of lo nacional."[88]

According to Carbonell, the idea of *lo nacional* had emerged not from the objective notion of uneven wealth distribution and system of ownership but from the experience of slavery as a search from freedom. Carbonell calls attention to the political implications within the notion of *lo nacional* as a concept that emerged from internal social and political dynamics and not from an objective ideology of class.[89] The Havana Greenbelt's rhetoric of production and its discourse of national unity constituted iterations of the same problem that Carbonell called attention to. *Lo revolucionario* furthered a rhetoric of *lo nacional* that turned the problem of internal divisions, the exploitation of peasants and racism, into an ideology of class. Through its rhetoric of production and national unity the Havana Greenbelt represented an idea of *lo nacional* that sought to erase the remainders of exploitation and discrimination. Yet, by the end of the 1960s, the rhetoric of *lo revolucionario* would not acknowledge that racial and regional differences existed, instead, it would claim and perform the idea that they had already been abolished. When Castro distinguished people who worked from those who did not, he was outlining the differences between those who worked from the class values

[88] Carbonell, *Cómo surgió*, [p. 83]

[89] Carbonell's book was censored and deemed divisive by official authorities even though Fidel Castro had claimed to be on the side of black people when he visited Harlem in September of 1960 and even took Carbonell's advise to find political allies in Africa.

associated with U.S. society such as consumption; diverting the attention away from unequal relationship of labor in Cuba.

Towards the end of *Coffea Arabiga*, images of factory workers engaged in the process of coffee roasting appear through a fast-moving montage. These images reveal the harsh conditions of labor that the idea of an agricultural plan in the countryside concealed. The sequence appears to be a mechanical assemblage echoing the repetitive actions of the machine. A disquieting and torturous feeling is transmitted through the fast progression of actions and the harsh conditions of labor. Later a group of workers appear drinking tiny little cups of coffee and an intertitle appearing flatly at the end of the sequence reads All blacks, all whites and we all drink coffee (Todos los negros y todos los blancos y todos tomamos café). This phrase, originally a slave's song, then modified by the *teatro bufo* (a minstrel show) and popularized by Afro-Cuban singer Ignacio Villa carries with it a history of racism.[90] The rhetoric of production and unity, the harsh conditions of labor at the factory, the images of workers drinking little bits of coffee and the phrase itself point to another irony. The *all drinking* seeks to transform the image of the worker's hard labor into one of consumption. Thus, although the song originally reads *all blacks drink coffee* (todos los negros tomamos café), it has now been transformed into a leitmotif of unity, where ironically the *all* iterates racial dualities.

As Anne Garland Mahler states "the seemingly guileless celebratory phrase that all blacks and all whites drink coffee becomes permeated with an irony that works to

[90] Moore, Robin; *Nationalizing blackness: afrocubanismo and artistic revolution in Havana*, 1920-1940. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, c1997.

undermine the state's celebratory rhetoric and that connects, rather than divorces, that rhetoric to the oppressive history of Cuban agriculture."[91] The Havana Greenbelt and its rhetoric of production represents what Antonio Benítez Rojo described as the colonial machine of exploitation.[92] Inaugurated by Colombus and the extraction of goods which continued with plantation as it keeps reproducing itself precisely because its ideological system refines and reformulates its logic of exploitation.

The propagandistic media campaign focused on the mobilization of middle class city dwellers and their work in the agricultural fields, concealing the harsh conditions of labor that the massive production system furthered. The mobilization of *habaneros* was central to staging a transgression of class ideology through the reproduction of racial and regional stereotypes. Lillian Guerra writes about the politics of representation that these production plans played and their currency during the first years of the Revolution. Alluding to a photograph that appeared in the magazine Mujeres from 1962 Guerra notes that "responding to the call to cut cane act also symbolized a collective act of white contrition for past privilege and socioeconomic wrongs from which most whites had benefited. In fact, those with nothing to prove—that is, Cuba's traditional and mostly black, male cane cutters—generally do not appear in press pictures of cane harvesting, voluntary or otherwise, until economic crisis prompted a return to professional cane-

[91] Mahler, "'Todos Los Negros".

[92] Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

cutting in 1965."[93] Guerra points to the visual politics emerging out of the rhetoric of production, but most importantly she suggests that racial stereotypes became ways to perform the elimination of regional and class divisions by further perpetuating them.

In the film, middle class white woman can be seen at the *secaderos* wearing what appears to be gardening attire. (Fig. 12) Then, two other women appear holding working tools. One of them wears field working garment that seems to protect her against the sun, while the other woman's skin seems to be burnt by the sun. Landrián inserts close-ups of their hands, which seems swollen and rough, as they hold their working tools to indicate that they are field workers and not city dwellers. (Figs. 13) Another close-up of nice hands resting on the working tools reveal subtle differences. (Fig. 14) Landrián seems to want to reveal the different relationship to labor. By calling attention to these differences the filmmaker disrupts the propagandistic visual politics of the Havana Greenbelt by calling attention to the subjectivities that the massive plan rendered invisible. Furthermore, through this gesture Landrián reclaims the agency of the women field workers and awards value to their agricultural labor. The stereotypes that middle class woman perform, are disrupted through the attention to details, to the gestures and marks denoting the agricultural worker's subjective relationship with labor.

In fact, Fidel Castro exploited the stereotypes attached to black popular music as a performance of happiness to imbue the rhetoric of production with a spirit of populism. We can locate this stereotype in colonial constructions of Afro-Cuban dance and music as

[93] Guerra, *Visions* [p. 153]

wildness and frenzy. Lo popular conveys the contradictions of *lo revolucionario* precisely because it represents an ideal homogeneous national subject while *lo popular* is a distinct and unique social body, expression or experience perceived as marginal and backward. Che Guevera had proclaimed that the popular character of the Cuban Revolution was granted to it through the spirit of lo popular. Thus, it was not just a Revolution but a Revolution with party (Revolución con pachanga).[94]

In the article "Los del baile: Pueblo, producción, performance" Dylon Robbins' recounts an anecdote from 1965 when Castro asked popular musician Pello el Afrokán to compose a song commemorating cane cutting.[95] Robbins suggests that by relating el Afrokán's music with production Castro thought to link work with music and transform the scornful attitudes towards agricultural labor, making it more amenable and happy. Castro used Pello's popularity to inflict the plans of production with an air of populism and failed to recognize the value of his music. In the interview that Robbins includes on his article appears that when a radio correspondent asks Castro to offer his opinion about el Afrokán's music, he diverts from the question and comments on the labor at the cane field.

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[94] This expression was used among supporters of the Revolution to describe its popular character. According to Lillian Guerra, Carlos Franqui described it as "playing the Communist Internationale to the rhythm of a conga, interpreting state socialism and the people's ownership from a "tropical, Cuban and black perspective"." Revolutionary leader Ernesto Che Guevara used a similar expression to describe a Cuban kind of socialism as "Un Socialismo con pachanga," meaning, with an Afro-Caribbean flavor. Pachanga is a word from the vernacular that mean "street party" and was also the name of a genre of popular music.

[95] Robbins, Dylon. (2013). "Los del baile: Pueblo, producción, performance". *la Fuga*, 2013.

For Landrián and documentary maker Sara Gómez the popularity of el Afrokán represented the centrality of black culture within Cuba's popular culture. (Fig. 15) There seems to be a connection between the music of el Afrokán and the documentary practice of these two filmmakers, as if they wanted to parallel their documentary practice with his music and advocate for the central role of blackness to the idea of *lo popular*, as a social and cultural experience. For example, in his documentary *Los del baile* (1965) the editing of footage from a concert of el Afrokán seems to dialogue with the dynamic texture of the music and the dancer's movements. Sara Gómez includes him at the end of her debut documentary *Iré a Santiago* (1963). Gómez links el Afrokán to the contemporary culture of Santiago de Cuba, reclaiming the city as the center not only of Afro-Cuban culture but of a national cultural and political history. (Fig. 16) Of Gómez' documentary Odette Casamayor has written that it "extends beyond the simple use of the interview and compilation of historical facts in favor of a more dynamic form of expression, though the director does not forestall history in the process".[96] Gómez resisted rendering Afro-Cuban culture as historical and it is in fact in the performance of el Afrokán appearing towards the end of the film where she claims the political present of *lo popular* and the social space of *lo nacional*.

The complex musical arrangements of his music reveal a series of influences that are yet centered and organized by African musical tradition of which el Afrokán claims inheritance through his artistic name. The fact that Landrián and Gómez included him in

[96] Casamayor, "Imagining" [p.70].

their documentaries suggest that el Afrokán's popular music embodied not only the popular culture where both filmmakers inscribed their practice but a black avant-garde of which documentary could claim presence. Gómez and Landrián conceptualized and inscribed their practice within a political consciousness through which they claimed the present of blackness as a social, political and cultural identity. *Coffea Arabiga* appears two years after the censorship of *Los del baile*, the documentary where the filmmaker renders homage to black and popular culture through a poetic evocation of different emotional states.

In *Coffea Arabiga* Landrián decenters the film's gaze outside or beyond the revolutionary regime of visibility embodied in the Havana Greenbelt to reclaim subjects and experiences that disappear in the visual and representational rhetoric of the agricultural plan. At minute 10:08 of the film, the narrative of coffee production centered around the Havana Greenbelt is interrupted by the voice of a radio host announcing Radio Baracoa Greenbelt. This diversion from Havana and towards Baracoa, a small town 144 km to the North East of Santiago de Cuba, de-centers the revolutionary political performance and its visual rhetoric. The aural experience conveyed through the voice on the radio disrupts the hyper-visibility of the Havana Greenbelt campaign as a spatially and temporally over-determining experience by announcing that "the poetic moment, the moment of *el recuerdo* has arrived". Images of a radio-listener appear through a montage of photographs that fade in and out of each other. A black woman seating on a rocking chair combs her hair and thinks of her lover. From the labor system of production of the Havana Greenbelt this sequence situates us in the domestic space of intimacy. A repose

for the senses and a coffee break, which gestures back to the first sequence and dislocates again the rhetoric of collectivity where material production is inscribed to one that is immaterial and personal.

By constructing the sequence in the style of photomontage, through fade-ins/fade-outs juxtapositions of still photographs Landrián marks another disruption, that of the propagandistic agit-prop montage style that conveyed an machine aesthetic to evoke a sense of efficiency and productivity. (Fig. 17) Furthermore, by fragmenting the moment through snapshots of an instant Landrián disrupts the disembodied and scientific narrative structuring the didactic documentary mode as part of industrial production to situate the documentary in the poetic and in memory as producers of experience. The progressive logic of production is de-centered through the portray of an instant in the black woman's life as a unifying aesthetic experience involving affect, memory, longing and pleasure. This sudden geographical disruption repeats the initial gesture of moving from Havana to Santiago, creating a rupture within the logic of the didactic documentary and that of official discourse. Cort claims that such "dissident" instances within the film "unhinge the official national image of its current social landscape".[97]

Landrián uses sound to disrupt the politics of the senses, convey a counter-presence and remind us of an absence. The sudden presence of the radial voice establishes a relationship between the politics of media and the politics of the representation by de-centering the visual, Havana, whiteness and masculinity as a public

[97] Cort, "Negrometraje", [p. 48]

space through the intimate poetic space where the black woman listens to radio and remembers. It is thus, a moment of stillness that steps outside the logic of production, movement and political action. According to Nadia Seremetakis, such moments "are expressions of non-syncronicity which become material encounters with cultural absence and possibility."[98] The destabilizing effect of this image denotes the multiple absences that the visual and ideological rhetoric of the Havana Greenbelt portended. One last important observation is that this sequence appeared in Landrián's documentary *Retornar a Baracoa* (1966) which was the last documentary he shot in that area. Through the radio's voice and the woman's remembering the sequence becomes a site for Landrián to inscribe his own remembering, in which he could locate the trace of a personal geography mapped throughout his documentary archive.

Coffea Arabiga decenters the revolutionary regime of visibility of the agricultural plan Havana Greenbelt, by calling attention to the contradictory rhetoric of national unity. By calling attention to the subjectivities and identities that the visual and ideological rhetoric conveyed through Havana Greenbelt rendered invisible Landrián calls attention to the dynamics of representation of space, race and gender within an exclusionary notion of the national experience. The film then, questions the spatial and temporal dimensions where *lo revolucionario* as a political identity locates *lo nacional*, by contesting its politics of representation. If the film constitutes indeed a decentering gesture that inscribes blackness as a social and political presence, is precisely because the didactic

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[98] Seremetakis, C.N. 1994. The memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks on the Transitory. *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, ed. C. N. Seremetakis, 1-18. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

documentary and the politics of representation of the Havana Greenbelt embodied a politics of the visible that was working to simulate the homogenous.

Conclusions: The Blind Spot

This study began as an investigation of the socio-political context where Afro-Cuban filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián produced the experimental didactic documentary *Coffea Arabiga*. The documentary itself and the circumstances around which it was produced reveal a series of tensions underlying the politics of representation permeating film practices during the complex period of the 1960s in Cuba. Learning about the censorship of Landrián's films and his complete ostracism from the history of Cuban cinema disjoints something about the revolutionary myth of the 1960s, a period that in the national imaginary exists as an epic moment for the affirmation of national identity and political consciousness. Cinema had a crucial role in forging a visual landscape around the axis of the Revolution and the revolutionary government's initiatives and discourses. Yet, Landrián's film reveals something different, that film practices had in fact developed within a complex social and political context marked by anxieties and contradictions.

By delving into the personal and political circumstances surrounding the making of the film—the several years of reclusion the filmmaker suffered and his expulsion from ICAIC years later—I have been trying to understand the subversive and dissident character of his practice. Landrián's own liminal position within the institution, as a worker of the State and a black artist with a critical vision, manifested throughout his work but more so through the series of didactic documentaries he created after his return to ICAIC in 1967. The State control over cultural institutions increased as discontent and

criticisms began to grow. Then the question became: under what political pressures and systems of repression was Landrián's work inserted and how were his films challenging systems of silencing and erasure that were rooted in patriarchal, Western and colonial ideologies?

Throughout my attempt to situate Landrián's documentary *Coffea Arabiga* in the social, political and cultural horizon of the 1960s in Cuba something seemed to be missing, hidden, a part of the story that got misplaced, kept away from view, a blind spot in Cuban historiographical practices. The central axis of Cuban history after 1959 has been the Revolution. Landrián's film sought to decenter that axis by directing our gaze towards subjects and experiences that were stereotyped or invisible within revolutionary regimes of visibility. *Coffea Arabiga* reveals the blind spot or false vision within revolutionary ideology and the Revolution as political vision and social praxis. The film contests historiographical practices generated through official institutional discourses that repeat old narratives of cultural, social and racial integration by situating blackness in a historical past, folkloric and removed. This erasure or denial of subjects and identities has resulted from an understanding of revolutionary identity as a homogeneous national subject. The film reveals how this re-ordering of social relationships functioned to render subjectivities invisible through a constant enactment of their negation.

The Revolution was a complex socio-political phenomenon that brought important structural changes to eliminate segregation and unequal access to jobs. Many Afro-Cuban writers, intellectuals, artists, historians, union workers, syndicalist leaders, politicians and journalists who were part of the Communist party before 1959 supported

the revolutionary government. However, as the 60s began to unfold, it became evident that internal social problems such as racial discrimination, sexism and regional prejudice not only remained but were being conspicuously perpetuated. By 1968, Marxism-Leninism was declared the doctrine of the revolutionary government and religious practices, particularly Afro-Cuban Santería, were discouraged and deemed an atavism. The documentaries by Gómez and Landrián that dealt with racism or render homage to black popular culture were censored and by 1974 both filmmakers had disappeared from ICAIC.

Unlike readings on Cuban cinema that consider film practices operating within revolutionary ideological and political discourses, this study looks at a film that complicates such understanding of its context. First, it challenges the idea that documentary practices in Cuba completely disrupted Western ideologies and pre-Revolutionary social relationships. And second, it decenters the paradigm of a political and ideological homogeneity in film practices by revealing the existence of conflicting artistic and political visions. This study reclaims a space for considering subjectivities within what for many years has been looked at objectively. The blind spot that *Coffea Arabiga* decenters and reveals is precisely the Western legacy of an objective point of view at the center of historiographical practices and political discourses that iterate racist and colonial orders of domination. Like the image at the beginning of the film, the blind spot is the thing we miss when there is most visibility.

This study considers Landrián's documentary *Coffea Arabiga* as a complex conceptual and aesthetic system of critiques and disruptions that puts on doubt the

government's rhetoric of integration and its race-blind rhetoric, the politics of representation around the Havana Greenbelt plan and situates blackness at the center of his documentary practice. Landrián critiqued the politics of representation permeating film practices and racial discourse, which rendered blackness to a removed past, as in fiction films, by yet censoring the representation of its social and political present. It became obvious that the problem was not so much how Afro-Cuban culture was represented but how blackness would enter the revolutionary regime of visibility.

Coffea Arabiga, as the product of thought and experience, conveys many possibilities and cuts across many conceptual, temporal and spatial contexts. Thus, considering a work that can overlay so many different critiques and simultaneously craft a space through which to reclaim subjectivities and presence which the very mechanism where the film exists tried to erase, is itself a destabilizing gesture for hermeneutic practices challenging art, film and cultural historians. *Coffea Arabiga* is a documentary that opens a window for looking through the complex context where it was produced and the ways in which its production was mediated. It was a film executed under many restrictions and conditions and perhaps because of that it constitutes the filmmaker's most complex film.

This study sees through the film and through its images the subjectivity of the artist, of the subject who produces. It was Landrián himself working at the Popular Encyclopedia towards the end of the 1960s who questioned regimes of interpretation, challenging those who believe institutional documentaries as being more reliable than the voice of their authors. That was precisely what cultural bureaucrats could not tolerate

then, the idea that film needed not to be about something but that could be itself something. The silencing of Landrián from Cuba's official history of film has inevitably pointed to the multiple and conflicting presences within Cuba's film history; revealing the elusive, contradictory and shifting social imaginaries that film as an artistic, ideological and propagandistic tool enabled.

Racism continues being a theme tabu in Cuba and a race-blind politics of representation has at least officially reduced blackness to the folkloric and to the past, censoring and discouraging any articulation of race as a subjectivity in the contemporaneous social context, or as a transnational and political conscience, given that this could destabilize a discourse of national identity that has sought to erase it. After the 1990s, about the same time that Landrián's films began to have more visibility within Cuba and abroad, there has been more willingness from the part of the Cuban government to acknowledge the persistence of racism. Whereas the government, or Cubans themselves are more willing to admit the latent racism that permeates social relationships and persists through structural forms of discrimination, years of a race-blind political ideology has created a void in our understanding of blackness as an identity with historical, political and social implications. Furthermore, making blackness invisible has conditioned historiographical practices from addressing or explaining how race and racial divisions operate in Cuba and how deep-rooted racist attitudes have conditioned political, social and cultural life.

There have always been artists, intellectuals, writers who have been critical of official and historical narratives that try to order ideas and perceptions by furthering

systems of exclusion. Who have claimed that there is the ideological apparatus and then there are complexities in the way ideas affect subjects and in how subjects might resist them. Landrián reveals both, which is why his work is so complex conceptually and visually. In Cuba, there have been artists all along the way who have been critical about the problem of racism or who have explored and questioned the political, historical, social, intellectual or even psychological dimension of blackness. From 1975 and until 1985, the Grupo Antillano was dedicated to reclaiming blackness in its various dimensions and to critically address racism.[99]

There are no black filmmakers at ICAIC today except for Gloria Rolando, the only female and black filmmaker who has produced several documentaries that investigate blackness as a cultural and historical identity and the history of black struggle in Cuba. Rolando has opted to work independently given that her documentaries lack support from the institution. Few publications circulate that address racism or blackness in its contemporaneity although there is a body of scholarship on the topic outside of Cuba. Cuban black intellectual Roberto Zurbano expressed in a statement published by the New York Times in 2013, that in Cuba change has yet to arrive for black people.[100] In his eye-opening statement, Zurbano called attention to several ways in which the effects of racism are visible in Cuba today. Although he asserted that there is "insufficient black

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[99] The book *Grupo Antillano: The Art of Afro-Cuba* by Alejandro de la Fuente offers a comprehensive study of the Afro-Cuban visual arts and cultural movement that thrived between 1978 and 1983 and has been written out of Cuban cultural and art history.

[100] Zurbano, Roberto; For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution Hasn't Begun. The New York Times (March, 23, 2013) http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/opinion/sunday/for-blacks-in-cuba-the-revolution-hasnt-begun.html

consciousness in the island" for radical changes to come, I would argue that there is also an insufficient understanding of how class, gender and racial dynamics operate to keep in place discriminatory, exclusionary and patriarchal ideological, social and political models. Listening to Zurbano speak and meeting him during his visit to the University of Texas in 2016 is one of the experiences that inspired and informed this thesis.

I began this study wanting to understand the politics of representation within the context of the 1960s through the visionary aesthetically and conceptually complex documentary *Coffea Arabiga* by of Nicolás Guillén Landrián. Yet, this thesis offers no final answer and claims no fixed meaning upon this documentary. It has, I hope, considered the importance of this documentary through an analysis of some sequences and images that complicate our understanding of the context where the film was produced and expand the ways in which we interpret the critical and artistic content of Landrián's work.

Figures

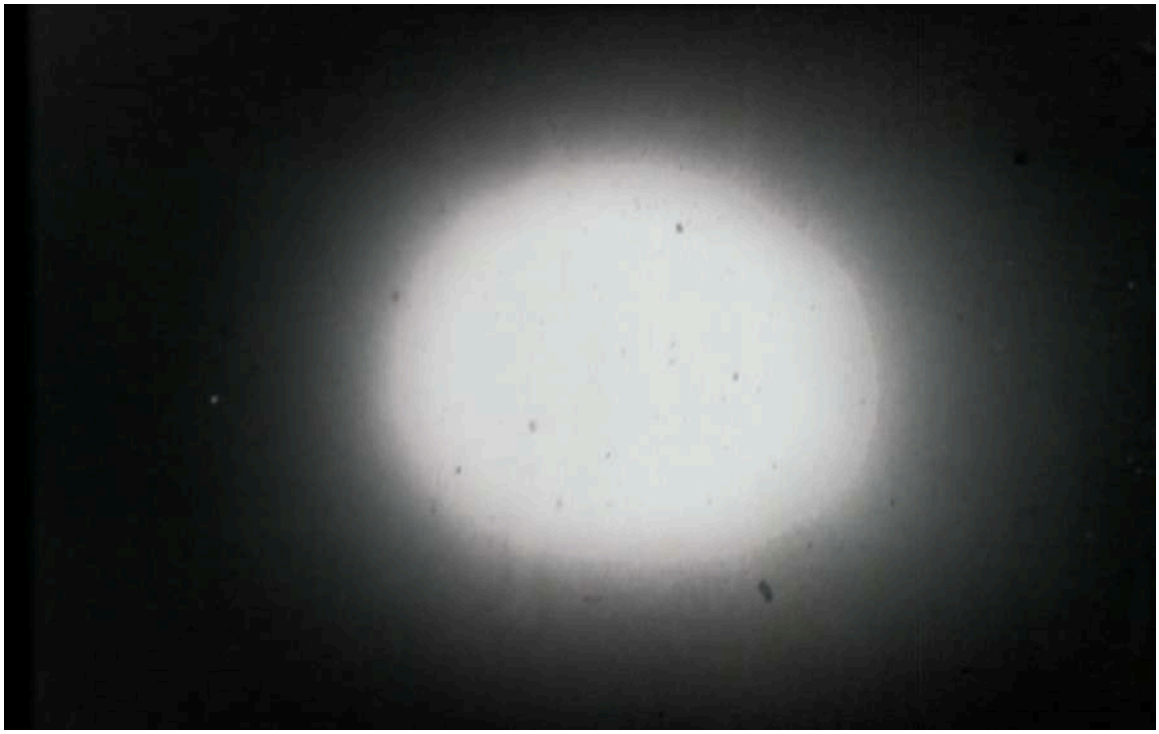

Figure 1: Still from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968

Figure 2: Still from *Por primera vez*, Octavio Cortázar, 1968

Figure 3: Stills from *El Mégano*, Julio García Espinoza, 1955

Figure 4: Stills from *Los del baile*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1965

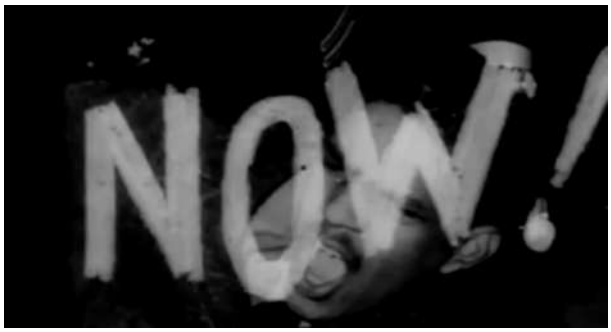

Figure 5: Stills from *Now!*, Santiago Álvarez, 1965

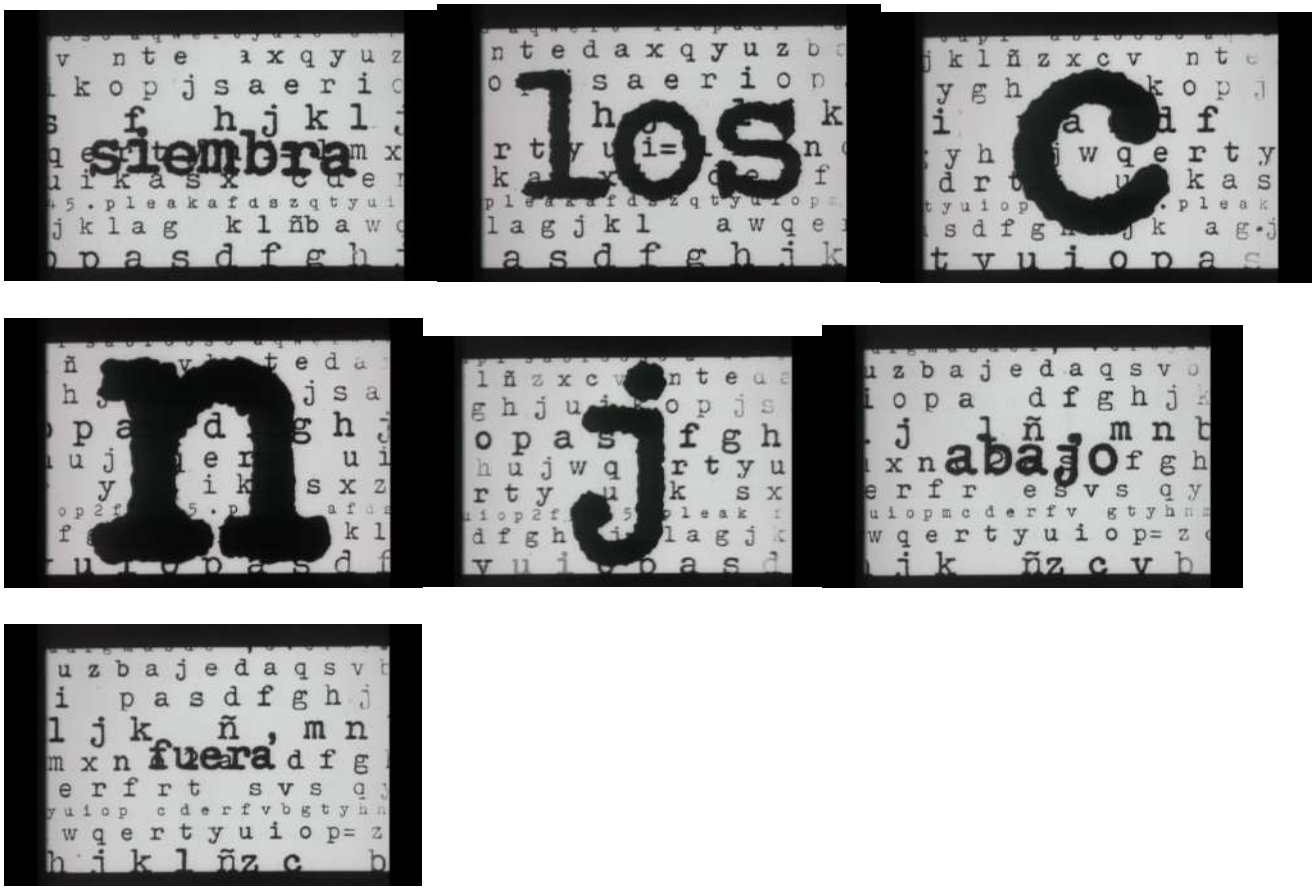

Figure 6: Selection of stills from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (From min. 3:10-3:47)

Figure 7: Still from *Ociel del Toa*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1965

Figure 8: Still from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968

Figure 9: Selection of stills from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (From min. 0:24-1:24)

Figure 9 (Cont.): Selection of stills from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (From min. 0:24-1:24)

Figure 10: Stills from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (From mins. 1:31, 1:37)

Figure 11: Selection of stills from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (From min. 15:51, 15:55, 15:59)

Figure 12: Selection of stills from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (From min. 12:08-12:49)

Figure 13: Selection of stills from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (From min. 12:08-12:49)

Figure 14: Still from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (min.12:49)

Figure 15: Still from *Los del baile*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1965 (Pello el Afrokán)

Figure 16: Still from *Iré a Santiago*, Sara Gómez, 1965 (Pello el Afrokán)

Figure 17: Selection of stills from *Coffea Arabiga*, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, 1968 (From min. 10:10-11:32)

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